COMMONWEAL

$2.00 June 16, 1995

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CORRESPONDENCE

Death penalty obscene

Arlington Heights, Ill.

To the Editors: Most of the discussion I have read of the death penalty seems to be carried on by theorists who have never witnessed an execution. I would be surprised to learn that Paul Baumann ["An Editorial Dissent," May 19], for example, who argued in your pages against "disproportionate mercy," is an old police reporter.

As someone who has covered an electrocution, I can tell you that the act is evil in itself, no matter how heinous the crimes of the prisoner, no matter how proper the judicial process.

Here come the prison guards, dragging in the prisoner to be killed. Here is the politically connected mob of witnesses, elbowing one another for a better view of the victim's body as the muscles tense with the shock of the electricity. A wisp of smoke rises from the prisoner's head, where the electrode scorches the flesh.

The more modern methods of gas chamber or lethal injection soften the spectacle but do not lessen the obscenity of a cold-blooded killing. RICHARD FRISBIE

Jesus & the death penalty

Republic, Mo.

To the Editors: Paul Baumann's editorial dissent favoring the death penalty, though cogently presented, still leaves us confronted with Jesus' ethic. They didn't get it in his day; we're not doing any better in ours. The church's traditional acknowledgment of the death penalty's moral legitimacy has to be placed in context; Catholicism—particularly, but not only, at the hierarchical level—has been more notorious for ignoring Jesus' ethic than for honoring it.

What was said to Jesus' ancestors about not killing, and about preferring nonviolence to demolishing eyes and teeth, echoes through the centuries. Yet the human thirst for vengeance still grows like crabgrass. We too easily run the risk of succumbing to the same sclerocardiac condition of which Jesus, in a different context, accused some of the Pharisees. The prognosis is not favorable. The editorial in the same issue has it right: The death penalty is wrong. Let us not kill.

ERIC KAHN, O.F.M.

The death of death

Houston, Tex.

To the Editors: I am genuinely puzzled by the arguments put forth in Paul Baumann's editorial dissent on capital punishment. Some thoughts:

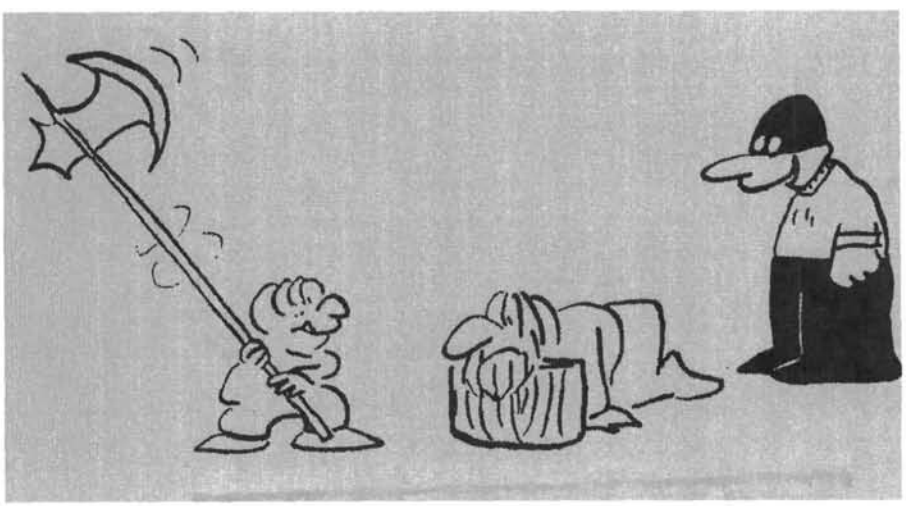
Baumann's constant refrain is that we owe the victims justice. We owe victims nothing; their fate has been sealed; they are with God; we cannot undo their death. As a society we do have an obligation to the living: to keep this murderer from murdering again. But we will not resolve the mystery of evil by further killing.

As Pope John Paul II points out, the *lex talionis*, the law of retribution, has been superseded. When Cain slew Abel, God did not exact vengeance but gave Cain a mark to protect him from those who would kill him in retribution. The sacredness of human life remains even in the murderer, who remains the icon and image of God. Save to protect the innocent when there is no other way, to kill the icon is sacrilege.

The Christian ethic and the human ethic are not irreconcilable, and the first has incrementally influenced the second through

(Continued on page 28)

Correction: The article "Time Travelers" in the June 2 issue was written by William J. Schickel, not Joseph Schickel. We apologize for the error.



"I hope you don't mind—I'm trying to get my son interested in the business."

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, Ohio 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional offices. Copyright © 1995 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $39; Canada, $41; foreign, $44. Special two-year rate: U.S. $67; Canada, $71; foreign, $77. Surcharge for air mail delivery to Europe, North Africa, Central or South America, $35 per year; for other parts of the world, $44 per year. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover, Antonucci; cover art by Adé Bethune and p. 14 photo by Judith Stoughton, both from *Proud Donkey of Schaerbeek: Adé Bethune, Catholic Worker Artist*; pp. 2, 5, 20, 22, 31, Baloo, Rothco; p. 6, Bas, Rothco; pp. 8, 10, Ross, Rothco; p. 11, Leed, Rothco; p. 16, Shiong, Rothco; p. 24, Paul Valerry.

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COMMONWEAL

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, Me. 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, N.Y. 10038.

Heads in the sand

When it comes to water quality, there is no substitute for the real thing. That is why the House vote last month (240-185) to gut parts of the Clean Water Act was so short-sighted and thick-headed. The 1972 law has produced a dramatic turnaround in the quality of this nation's water supply. Whereas less than 40 percent of waters evaluated by states in 1972 met water-quality standards, by 1992 that figure had risen to over 60 percent. This "accomplishment for posterity" was achieved by exerting vigorous control over sources of water pollution, public and private. In the past twenty years, taxpayers have spent over $75 billion to upgrade sewage treatment, and the manufacturing sector has poured in billions more. Clean water has not come cheap; that is one reason to safeguard it.

But for some, like Congressman Bud Shuster (R-Pa.) who sponsored the House bill, the costs exceed the benefit. That is why he excluded the Environmental Protection Agency—which he calls an "environmental Gestapo"—from giving testimony in drafting the new House bill. Instead, he invited lobbyists from the chemical and paper industries; their input had a powerful legislative impact.

The House bill ends mandatory federal standards on storm-water pollution—the runoff from factories, mines, mills, and city streets—and makes the program voluntary. It weakens present standards for dealing with industrial waste, and limits states in imposing stricter standards than the federal government's. (In this instance, watered-down standards fashioned in usually hateful Washington will be allowed to trump all others—no states' rights issue here.) The House bill also reduces the number of designated wetlands—those sites so critical in the natural process of water purification—by as much as 50 percent. Both the National Academy of Sciences and the National Conference of State Legislatures vigorously opposed the provision. According to Virginia Wetherell, secretary of Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, the bill "undercuts much of our progress and creates new problems without solving old ones."

Congressman Shuster says that last November's election was a mandate to rein in "top-down government regulations, and clean water is one of the areas crying out for reform." Clearly, some environmental regulations have proven impractical. If it is prudent, regulations should be refined and perhaps relaxed. But is allowing factories and treatment plants to do less than they do now the solution? Is changing the definition of a wetland to suit political expediency? That's not the way to maintain—let alone improve—the nation's once and future water quality.

In survey after survey, 70 percent of Americans favor current or *stronger* legislation to protect the environment. That is a powerful tide that legislators ought to be made aware of. Let the Senate take heed and the White House stand firm. Democratic nations have taken the lead in protecting and maintaining the environment, and the

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improved environmental quality in the newly democratic countries of both Eastern Europe and the Far East (such as Taiwan and South Korea) is a matter of record. The United States must not let its leadership in this area evaporate.

FIRST, DO NO HARM

Anencephalic babies, babies born with a brain stem but without a cerebral cortex, usually die within a few days of their birth. Until recent years, their condition was treated with care and comfort; nothing medically could be done for them. Today medicine can still do nothing *for* them, but some medical practitioners would like to do something *to* them. For though these infants do not have brains, they do have hearts, lungs, livers—organs that some surgeons and pediatricians want to harvest for transplant.

Legal prohibitions, technical problems, and moral repugnance had stayed the hands that would kill a dying infant in order to take those organs—until now.

But recently a committee of the American Medical Association has concluded that it is ethically permissible for doctors to take such organs if the parents ask to donate the infant's organs and if the diagnosis of anencephaly is confirmed by two experts not part of the transplant team. Exceptions to the current brain-based definition of death laws would have to be changed to accommodate this practice. State legislatures should resist such efforts.

Implicit in the AMA's recommendation is the view that the anomalous character of the anencephalic infant means that he or she does not constitute protectible human life. If they are born dying anyway, why shouldn't their body parts be used to save the lives of others, especially other infants? Won't this give their brief lives meaning they otherwise lack?

On the contrary, whatever meaning the life of an anencephalic infant has must be encompassed in the few days that it lives—not in the days, months, years that its organs live in others. At least one meaning the rest of us need to reckon with is that the life of an infant who will live only briefly, who demonstrates few signs of personhood, nevertheless deserves our respect as a human being, and the care and dignity that entails. Removing a beating heart from a still-living human reduces life to a mere utilitarian calculus.

ET CETERA

HOME OF THE WHOPPER Writing on "Evil's Return" (when did it leave?) in the *New York Times Magazine* (June 4), Ron Rosenbaum praises the well-known theologian Quentin Tarantino, writer and director of *Pulp Fiction*, a film of unsuspected metaphysical depth. "What I love about Quentin Tarantino's screenplay is how apparently throwaway time-passing dialogue often embodies tricky theological questions," Rosenbaum writes. Since nearly every other word in *Pulp Fiction* is a four-letter word, the theologically inclined wait with tongue-piercing anticipation to see how Rosenbaum will pull this particular decapitated rabbit out of Tarantino's notoriously blood-filled top hat.

According to Rosenbaum, a conversation between two professional killers about what a McDonald's quarter pounder is called in France "is ultimately about the relativity of systems of value." This connection is made explicit when a Big Kahuna Burger—as in THE Big Kahuna—is alluded to by a hit man who regards his salvation during a shootout as an act of divine intervention.

"The invocation of the Big Kahuna challenges the ironies of nominalism (it's all in the name) and ethical relativism (it's all in the frame) that have been flickering back and forth in the Quarter Pounder dialogue," Rosenbaum asserts with considerable mustard. "Challenges them by posing absolutism beyond (or beneath) frameworks, points of view and eyes-of-beholders, forcing Jules [born-again hit man] to question his own comfortable framework, something Vincent [doomed Big Kahuna skeptic] never does."

Possibly. But like Michael Jordan and Larry Bird in those McDonald's TV commercials, it sounds like Rosenbaum has tried to bank in this bravado shot from the top of the Sears Tower, bouncing it off Calvin, Kant, Mario Cuomo, and Alvin Plantinga, and reaching for "nothin' but net." One man's theodicy being another moviemaker's lurid campy epic, Jules, Vincent, Quentin, and Ron all deserve a break today.

REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

STRONG WINDS FROM D.C.

THE END OF PROTECTION?

The American environmental movement is in disarray and on the defensive. The 1994 Republican victory has led to an across-the-board attack on the progress the country has made over the last twenty-five years to protect the environment.

Since Earth Day, 1970, landmark legislation has been enacted to protect our air, water, and endangered species. Billions of dollars have been spent to undo the ravages created in building a nuclear arsenal. Corporations have felt obliged to present themselves and their activities as environmentally benign. Being "green" has been held up as an ideal, especially to the young.

All of this is now under attack. The "Wise Use" movement—successor to the "Sagebrush Rebellion" of the early eighties, especially strong in the West—wants to allow ranchers and timber companies to do more or less as they wish with federal lands. Farmers and developers object to measures protecting wetlands,

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measures that they claim interfere with their private-property rights. "Takings" legislation that would compensate owners for loss of value when land is set aside for environmental purposes is on the fast track in Congress. Hunters and others object to protection given endangered species and their habitats.

The Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—long considered a dead letter—is being given renewed attention in an attempt to reassert the rights of the states against the federal government and to roll back higher federal standards for the environment. Individual counties in the Western United States now claim that they and not the federal government own public lands. Federal employees have been shot at and are often in physical danger as they carry out their duties.

In face of this attack on environmental safeguards, the Clinton administration, rather than asserting its authority, has sought to compromise with congressional opponents. As Arkansas governor, Bill Clinton was not a strong environmentalist, and he won the movement's votes because of Al Gore's record and interest in the environment. Environmentalists expected the 1992 Democratic victory to reinvigorate their cause. Their hopes seemed fulfilled when Bruce Babbitt, former head of the League of Conservation Voters, was named secretary of the Interior Department. But Babbitt's push to regain control of public lands from ranching interests has been stalled by local opposition and the administration's unwillingness to go all out on his behalf.

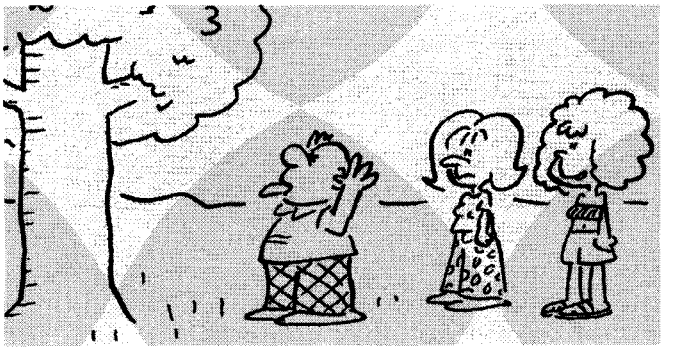
General distrust of government, in the name of still-revered American values such as individualism and the sanctity of private property, has created an ideological overlap between the militia movement and the proponents of "Wise Use." Federal laws aimed at protecting the environment and controlling guns are both offered as examples of federal tyranny.

Has the light of history turned Red for the Greens?

These problems are exacerbated by failures within the environmental movement itself. Mainstream organizations, such as the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and the Natural Resources Defense Council often disagree on national politics; the battle over NAFTA split them badly. They do little to coordinate their lobbying efforts. To the old charge of elitism has been added the charge that environmental organizations have simply become another group of well-paid Washington bureaucrats who have lost touch with the people whose views they purport to represent.

What does the future hold? Even Gregg Easterbrook, author of *A Moment on the Earth: The Coming Age of Environmental Optimism* (Viking)—a book criticized by many environmentalists as grossly overstating the case that the environment is improving—has written that the current Congress may well undo most of the progress he sees as having been made. Among the factors he notes is that most of those business interests who have proclaimed, and advertised, their devotion to being Green have wholeheartedly supported the roll-back of federal regulations. In mid-May, the House passed legislation gutting the Clean Water Act. Thirty-four moderate Republicans, mostly from Eastern states, voted no, but more than forty-five conservative Democrats, mostly Southerners, voted yes; the 240 to 185 vote was a triumphant footnote to Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America." Vice-President Gore reacted, saying, "The Republican leadership in the House and Senate is evidently trying to insure that this Congress will go down in history as the most anti-environmental Congress ever." The Senate may yet revise much of the antigovernment efforts of the House, and the courts conceivably could thwart or modify many efforts to cut back on environmental protection. Much depends on future political dynamics. Whether Clinton will use his veto power on these issues—and successfully—remains to be seen. And, of course, the effectiveness of the mainstream environmental organizations in resisting this onslaught on twenty-five years of environmental protection laws remains highly problematic. "A moment on the earth," may turn out to have been a matter of mere seconds. VICTOR FERKISS

Victor Ferkiss is professor emeritus of government at Georgetown University, and the author of Nature, Technology, and Society: Cultural Roots of the Current Environmental Crisis *(New York University Press).*



"Fred's an anti-environmentalist."

In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated July 14.

REPORT ON THE MIDDLE EAST

A THREE-SIDED PEACE
NEGOTIATIONS WOBBLE

Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) form a triangle for Mideast peace. But with increased terrorism in Israel and the West Bank, a challenged and indecisive PLO, and a growing antipeace-process mood in Israel, will the triangle hold?

The breakdown of the peace process would be tragic, considering the distance already traveled by the peacemakers. The 1993 decision of Israel's Labor government to negotiate with the PLO represented a courageous reversal of poli-

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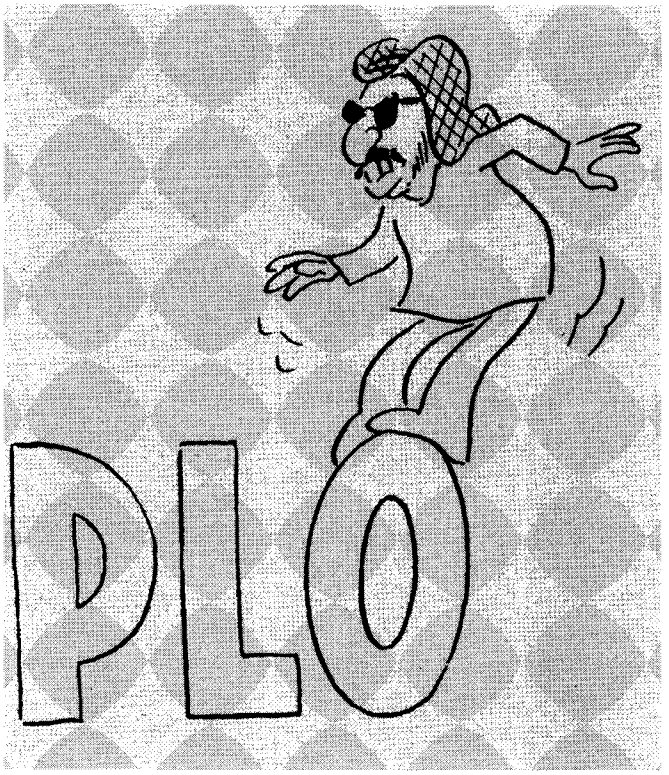

cy. It was undertaken because party leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres recognized that continued military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was hurting Israel more than helping her.

The Palestinian *intifada* ("uprising"), begun in December 1987, forced a major deployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza. Stones were answered with bullets, kids were chased, weeping mothers were filmed for the world news—the worst press for Israel since the Lebanon war in 1981. The Israeli occupation had lasted more than twenty-five years, going back to the 1967 war. Rabin and Peres decided to end it and to redirect the army to safeguard Israel's borders.

Since the Israeli-Palestinian agreement in November 1993, the PLO has had to make the difficult transition from revolution to governing. PLO chief Yasir Arafat is "all things to all men": revolutionary, politician, organizer, loner; he is a cautious man who survives by deals, an autocrat who signs all the checks and who alone knows where all the PLO money is—which leads to questions of financial accountability.

Is Arafat failing the challenge of governing? Since the PLO began administering Gaza, there has been a rising mountain of garbage, no new housing, schools, medical facilities, or jobs. Few ordinary Palestinians feel that the PLO agreement with Israel has inaugurated a new era of hope for them.

The PLO's ineffectiveness is underscored by the successes of its new archrival, the Islamic Resistance Movement, known by its Arabic acronym, Hamas. Hamas has effectively provided badly needed technical, medical, and educational services to Gazans. It has given money to families whose male provider has been denied work in Israel. To Hamas, the PLO-Israeli agreement is a sellout to the Zionists, deserving of God's punishment, as graffiti attest on the walls of Arab towns and villages throughout the country. Despite its failures, however, the PLO remains the choice of most Palestinians who are not yet ready to support the radical aims of Hamas and throw out all hope for peace with Israel.

The signing of the Israeli-PLO agreement drew Jordan into the peace process, formalizing a de facto thirty-year peace between King Hussein and Israel. Israeli leaders had regularly warned the king of assassination plots and made it clear to Syria and other Arab states that any attack on Jordan would be treated as an attack on Israel herself. Hussein, for his part, prevented terrorists from crossing his borders into Israel.

Should the continuing peace process lead to the establishment of an Arab state in Gaza and the West Bank, Israeli leaders believe that for the sake of stability and security it should take the form of a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation. Not without reason. Jordan is today more than 60 percent Palestinian, and the thought of a totally independent Arab Palestine between Israel and Jordan causes as much fear in Amman as it does in Jerusalem. The alternative for Hussein and for the Israelis is one Palestinian-Jordanian confederal state, in which the Palestinians will have political self-expression but the Hashemite monarchy and its Bedouin Legion can control extremism and terrorism.

The bind in which the PLO finds itself is that to remain a politically effective organization it must negotiate with Israel to achieve self-determination for the Palestinians. But in negotiating with Israel, it is vulnerable to the charge made by Hamas and other rejectionists that it has abandoned its revolutionary zeal and, under the camouflage of peace, signed away Arab Palestine to Jewish settlers. Further, by continuing West Bank Jewish housing construction and threatening the expropriation of Arab land in and around Jerusalem, the Israeli government has handed Hamas a club with which to beat the PLO.

To placate the revolutionaries, Arafat and his advisors have deliberately declined to amend the Palestinian National Convention, which calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. In so doing, they alarm Israelis about the ultimate territorial intentions of the Palestinians, and hand the hawkish Likud party a club with which to beat dovish Labor. To make matters worse, Likud has mischievously sought to scuttle the peace process over the issue of Jerusalem. And in Washington, Senator Bob Dole (R-Kans.) and other prominent politicians have called for the immediate relocation of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But the PLO bind extends further. Increased Arab terrorism sours more Israelis on peace and causes them to ask: If Arafat will not or cannot stop Arab terrorism, how can he be trusted to keep the peace once he heads a state alongside Israel? Yet a PLO strike against Hamas could ignite a Palestinian civil war. To keep peace in his seriously divided house, Arafat rhetorically condemns terrorism but actually does little to discourage it. Meanwhile, as Hamas weakens the PLO and the Israelis recoil from terrorism, time is running out for both Arafat and Rabin.

Conversations with Israelis and Palestinians convince me

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that if the triangle for peace breaks apart, killing will resume at a level greater than what we have seen from terrorism. A failed peace will trigger more *intifada*, more military occupation, more Jewish housing construction, and a shattering of the Palestinian dream of self-determination. A failed peace will mean a victory for terrorism, for the peace rejectionists in Hamas and Likud, and would be a severe blow to American peace initiatives.

Henry Siegman, the former head of the American Jewish Congress, has argued that the slowness of the peace process invites terrorism (*New York Times*, January 26, 1995). He believes that lasting peace hinges on the prospect of Palestinian statehood, and urges Israeli leaders to declare their intention to support a limited Palestinian state. "By setting the limits of statehood now, Israel can disabuse those who entertain the false notion that a full return to the pre-1967 borders is possible."

Will Prime Minister Rabin muster the courage to declare Palestinian statehood as the goal of the peace process? Will he urge King Hussein to work for a federal solution to the question of Palestinian independence? Will he discontinue Jewish settlements in Arab territory and begin to dismantle them? And

The woman behind the scenes

In April 1990, along with a small American delegation, I was invited to meet with Israelis and Palestinians then in the midst of the *intifada*. One of the most impressive of our interlocutors was Hanan Ashrawi, a Christian Palestinian, English professor, and dean at Barzeit University in Ramallah, then closed down by the Israelis. Our meeting in East Jerusalem had been arranged by our Israeli hosts, meetings that would have been denounced in the United States, but that were not uncommon among Palestinians and Israelis themselves. Discovering this gave us Americans the sense that things were moving. Meeting Ashrawi reenforced that sense. She clearly understood the moral leverage that the *intifada* brought to the stalemate. She believed that many Israelis, if not the Likud government, had the moral sensibilities to respond. Ashrawi, appealing to our small group as though we had the power to begin peace talks, was articulate and knowledgeable. She did not mouth political slogans or present the condition of the Palesinians in ideological abstractions, but, as she said, in their human dimensions, not as terrorists but men and women, mothers and fathers desperate to end the siege of their children's lives by the Israeli occupation.

Her desire to create a Palesinian discourse and point of view from the "inside" was carried out, at first, in meeting delegations like ours from all over the world, in organizing demonstrations, student defense teams, women's groups, and civil rights activities, often with the collaboration of sympathetic Israelis. This "creation of a discourse" about the Palestinian situation was expanded in the decision of "insiders" and "outsiders" (the PLO and Palestinians in exile) to go to Madrid, where Ashwari served as spokesperson. She convinced the PLO leadership that the opening address (which she wrote) be given in English so that the whole world could understand it, above all Americans. And then finally she struggled through bilateral Palestinian-Israeli talks under the sponsorship of the United States, first with Secretary of State James Baker and then Warren Christopher.

All the details of this are set forth in *This Side of Peace: A Personal Account* (Simon and Schuster, $25, 318 pp.). Though a Palestinian-Israeli Accord was ultimately reached through a back-channel diplomatic effort carried out in Oslo, while the bilateral talks continued, without Hanan Ashrawi even the fragile peace that now exists could never have been achieved.

Not only did she passionately and accurately represent the situation of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, she was able through her command of English and familiarity with the United States (she has a Ph.D. in medieval studies from the University of Virginia) to plead the case for Palestinian sovereignty in ways that many Americans had never before grasped. During months of negotiations, she curbed some of the worst factionalism and double-dealing of the PLO while maintaining the confidence of Yasir Arafat. By her persistence in dealing with the Israelis, she made the possiblity of a Palestinian people in a Palestinian nation a reality. When she and Faisal Husseini, the other "inside" member of the Palestinian delegation, finally saw the Oslo agreement to which Arafat had agreed, she reports their extreme concern "about the gaps, ambiguities, lack of detail, and absence of implementaiton mechanisms." It was clear to them that those who initialed the agreement did not live in the Occupied Territories. Her appeal to Arafat to take a more rigorous stand was refused, and she knew that she could not serve in a PLO "government." Instead she turned to building the practices and policies of a civic society as the founder of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights.

Seeing Arafat and the PLO from Ashrawi's sympathetic but critical perspective, three thoughts come to mind: First, the years Palestinians spent wandering in the "desert" may have had as much to do with Arafat's duplicity and idiosyncracies as with his tenacity and resolve. Second, Hanan Ashrawi's decision to forgo a political role in the interim government was an act of great integrity. Third, someday soon she will have to reenter the political fray to bring sanity, passion, and the human dimension to a peace that could yet be won. MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

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will Yasir Arafat have the courage to convince by deeds, and not only words, that he intends to lead the Palestinians to statehood in peace with Israel?

The coming months hold the answers to these questions. But one thing is certain: If the peace triangle breaks down, it will be harder for Washington to justify sending billions of dollars annually to bring security, peace, and prosperity to the peoples of that timeless and troubled land.

THOMAS A. IDINOPULOS

Thomas A. Idinopulos is professor of religious studies at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, and a consulting editor to the Middle East Review.

OF SEVERAL MINDS Sidney Callahan

THE THIRST FOR REVENGE

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

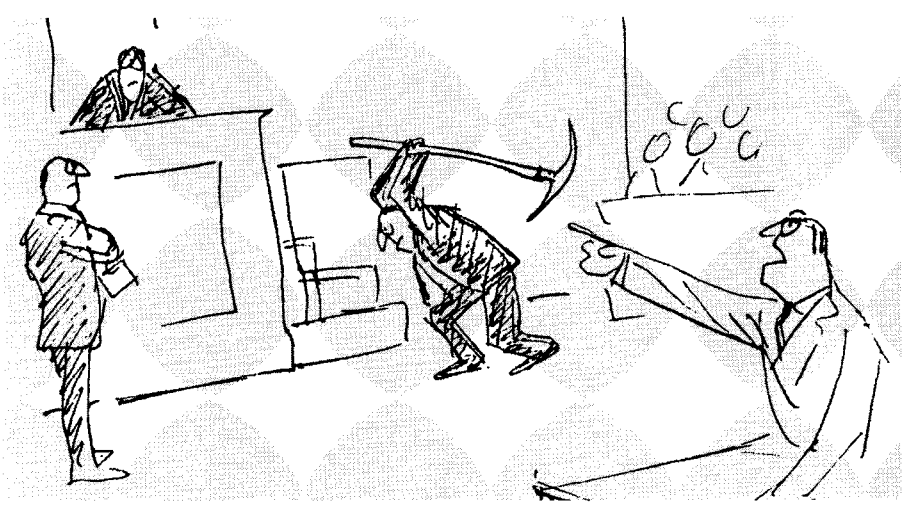
How *can* people be in favor of capital punishment? Good question. Those of us who are thoroughly convinced that capital punishment is morally wrong, find it difficult to understand how we can differ from the majority of our fellow Americans. Alas, most Catholics, brush off the teachings of the pope and their bishops, and favor the death penalty.

In order to understand what's going on here, I've taken to some hard listening to death-penalty advocates. I want to penetrate this different moral universe. Admittedly, I'm not pursuing a disinterested intellectual inquiry. I'm motivated by the Machiavellian desire to persuade and change attitudes. I don't know if I'd go so far as to run focus groups, but it does seem important to understand what guides and fuels the convictions of one's opponents.

I've concluded that few people decide their position on capital punishment by calculating which rational arguments produce the better case. Instead, the debate over the death penalty appears to be a conflict of deep-seated, emotionally saturated moral principles in which utilitarian considerations play a minor role.

Those in favor of the death penalty aren't moved by arguments that capital punishment actually costs the state more money than life imprisonment, or by the findings that indicate that it doesn't deter murder or violent crime. For that matter, those against the death penalty don't hold to their convictions because it's financially cheaper or an ineffective deterrent.

More to the point, advocates of capital punishment will admit that some innocent persons have been, and will continue to be, wrongly executed, and yes, black defendants in certain states will be condemned to die in greater numbers than white defendants. These facts are considered unfortunate, unavoidable flaws in the system, but still an acceptable price to pay.



"Objection!"

To get what? I think the basic appeal of the death penalty is that its advocates believe that only by taking a murderer's life can true justice be served. It's not so much an eye for an eye, as it is that certain criminal atrocities against the innocent demand the symbolic blood offering of the criminal's life. The act of execution, however cruel, gives symbolic witness both to the importance of the victim's life that is lost and to the community's absolute rejection of crime.

Certainly, bloodshed offered in reparation appears to perform a ritual function for some families of victims. The signing of a restored death penalty bill in New York was celebrated by Governor George Pataki with parents whose policeman son had been murdered. The speeches claimed that making the death penalty legal again was a fitting public memorial to all those unjustly slain.

And just how many of these public memorials and executions have taken place in our collective history? Within living memory we have seen semipublic firing squads, hangings, and guillotinings. A century or two before that, condemned persons were hung and disemboweled while still conscious. Or torn into four parts; or stoned, burned, or buried alive; or impaled, flogged to death, or thrown into boiling oil; or hung up in chains (or on crosses) to rot in torment. Huge crowds, including children, attended public executions.

Another symbolic undercurrent to be reckoned with in the thirst for the death penalty is the need for purification of the corporate body. Listen to the rhetoric of disgust. These criminals are vile animals, inhuman scum who don't deserve to live. They've forfeited their rights; the world will be far better off without them.

To smash and destroy impurity is an

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ancient impulse; hunt heretics, pull down pagan altars, pulverize idols, or even, à la Cromwell, shatter stained glass windows—let no polluting presence abide in the land.

Perhaps, too, collectively killing the transgressor makes a community feel less anxious and more in control of the uncertain dangers of fate. Surely it can strengthen solidarity—even if in a perverse way. Forget the rowdies who drink and raucously celebrate executions outside the prison walls; they and others like them will turn up at any exhibition or blood sport without any inkling of what they're about.

But to probe motivations in the death-penalty debate opens your own position to the same treatment. Could it be that your sympathy with criminals and rebels is related to your rebellion against your authoritarian father, teacher, priest? Do you have a problem with advocating moral accountability? Or perhaps your congenital temperamental timidity—read cowardice—makes you unwilling to face the fact that justice must wield a terrible swift sword. Mmm. Maybe, but it's unlikely to be the main point of a protest against capital punishment.

I think the moral force of the position against the death penalty comes from the conviction that it is logically and morally contradictory to kill in order to punish killing. By enacting a state-mandated, cold-blooded destruction of a human life you've lost the moral struggle and witness against murder. You imitate the murderer and thereby let his dedication to violence, cruelty, hopelessness, and death's final solution win the day.

Moreover, the horror of mistakenly executing an innocent person looms as too perilous a moral risk. As my father always said (who could be pretty authoritarian at times), "Better that a hundred guilty people go free than one innocent person be punished." I agree wholeheartedly, but find it difficult to defend the moral intuition fueling this conviction. Either you feel its fire or you don't.

Life sentences without parole should protect the community and fully affirm free will and moral responsibility for an agent's actions. Sure, some pathetic souls don't know what they do when they commit crimes, but many persons are fully aware and freely choose evil. They should be punished. But those criminals who ask to be executed should not be allowed to pursue their death trajectory, any more than those choosing homicide, suicide, euthanasia, or abortion should be allowed to kill at will. Always and everywhere, killing encourages killing.

In order to help break these cycles, the Mercy Sisters of Brooklyn have mounted a unique campaign against the death penalty. You sign a petition, but you also send in a notarized statement: If you're murdered, you don't want the law to seek the death penalty in your case. I don't want a person strapped into an electric chair for electrocution or held down for a lethal injection as my memorial.

And can't we make the case for others that it is far better to affirm a victim's life by an affirmative act: to refuse to take a life in retribution, to give another a future. If nothing else, life imprisonment gives hope of a criminal's repentance; many murderers have come to suffer grievously over the cruelty of their violence and wrongdoing. Human compassion for all, even for those twisted evildoers with little empathy, models the kind of behavior we need in order to flourish in human solidarity.

As for ridding the world of the impure and morally guilty who violate human norms, this impulse of moral disgust should be suppressed. Not only do such impulses tend to get out of control (usually in a racist direction), but in reality we all do share a common membership in our all-too-fallible species. Each criminal is born of woman. The difference between the worst of us and the best of us is enormous, but may not be a completely unbridgeable chasm for those with imagination and compassion. So what kind of people do we want to be? Choose life. □

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OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

WHAT TINA HATH WROUGHT

BROWNOUT AT THE 'NEW YORKER'

The *New Yorker* was once one of my favorite magazines. It now ranks down there with *People* and *Vanity Fair* as an example of trend-chasing and celebrity fascination at its most shallow, though in its sophisticated pretense it is less honest than *People*. When Tina Brown went to the *New Yorker* from *Vanity Fair,* she cut back on both the quantity and the quality of the fiction, one of the magazine's former strengths, shortened the articles, carried more pieces on movie stars, and introduced photos of fa-

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mous people we are supposed to be interested in (including a recent long section on the Simpson trial celebs). In a *Los Angeles Times* piece, Garrison Keillor—who wrote for the *New Yorker* when it was usually worth reading—said, "Tina Brown hasn't changed the *New Yorker*, she has obliterated it. There is still a magazine, just as there is a place called Penn Station, but nobody confuses it with the old one." I read Keillor's piece, reprinted in *Newsday*, before my copy of the April 17 issue of the *New Yorker* arrived. On the cover was a crucified Easter Bunny, hung on an IRS form.

A couple of days later, on National Public Radio, cartoonist William Hamilton spoke of a form of *New Yorker* censorship he had endured. He submitted a cartoon about the recent flap at Yale: a rich man withdrew some money he had donated for courses in Western culture because he couldn't have enough influence on the course contents. The magazine accepted the cartoon, but wanted to change the caption, in which a flustered donor was worrying that they were giving all his money "to blacks and gays." The *New Yorker* wanted to change the caption to read, "to blacks and feminazis," using a term known to Rush Limbaugh fans. The reason: gays would "go ballistic," according to the editor, when they saw the cartoon. Hamilton accepted the change, he said, because he needed the money; but he was surprised, after hearing of this sensitivity to the feelings of gay readers, that the *New Yorker* was willing to print a cover that was certain to be offensive to many Christians.

The cover has been protested by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, and also by Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League, who said in a letter to the *New Yorker* that "it is important that prominent publications show more sensitivity." Bill Reel, *Newsday*'s house Catholic columnist, didn't object to the cover. The question, he says, is "Do we want a reputation for censorship?"

Which misses the point entirely. No one is denying that the *New Yorker* has every legal right to be completely offensive. But I have the right (maybe even the duty) to find the cover offensive, and to cancel my subscription, which I have done. To accept this sort of thing without protest is to accept the marginalization of what matters to us most. We would find a cartoon that mocked the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., or the deaths of Jews in the Holocaust most offensive; the crucifixion of one who loves us to the death is similarly not to be taken lightly. It isn't censorship to protest or to cancel a subscription, any more than a boycott of the Nestle company or of table grapes interferes with the liberty of capitalists to endanger infants in poor countries, or growers to exploit cheap labor. It does say that we don't approve of these things, and will vote the only way we can, by withdrawing money from people to whom money matters a lot.

The flap over the cover is seen by some people to be a battle between defenders of an old, stodgy, elitist institution (the magazine as it was when edited by William Shawn) and a magazine more attuned to what's really of interest to a younger, hipper audience. I found the old *New Yorker* dull, often; but the fiction was much better, many of the long pieces were excellent—nothing like them could be found anywhere else—and it could absorb you for hours, when it was good.

Not all the changes under Tina Brown have been bad. The magazine's interior use of color and the overall graphic look is generally better, and some new writers (the critic Anthony Lane in particular) are as good as anyone who ever wrote for the magazine. The fiction is generally much worse than it was under Shawn and his successor, Robert Gottlieb; the cartoons are usually not as funny (even when they haven't been censored); and it never takes more than an hour to get through an issue.

Hamilton's story about the censored cartoon is revealing. The *New Yorker* wants to appear tolerant and liberal—where fashion dictates tolerance and liberality. Paul Wilkes, who wrote articles for Robert Gottlieb's *New Yorker* on religious subjects, wanted to talk with Tina Brown about an article Gottlieb had commissioned about a rabbi who was a "seeker after truth." Quoted by Joanne Weintraub, in an interesting *American Journalism Review* article (April 1995) about the magazine, Wilkes said, "Her eyes glazed over....Then she asked me, 'How about a profile of Bruce Ritter?'"

Either the editors knew how offensive a cover with a crucified Easter bunny was, and just didn't care; or, as the Wilkes story suggests, when it comes to religious matters they just plain don't get it. Either way there is a problem.

It hurts a little to cancel my subscription to a magazine which still does some good things on occasion; but thanks to Tina Brown's editorship, it hurts a lot less than it would have a few years ago. □

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BEING SICK IN AMERICA

TRY THE POLISH CURE

ROBERT FLEET

During the two-year-long, largely futile, debate on health care one heard with growing alarm the horror story that "socialized medicine" would be the end result of tampering with "the best health-care system in the world"—to quote a popular TV ad featuring a handsome doctor-spokesman. Warnings of long lines and lowered standards prevailed: If medicine were socialized, Americans would lose the "right to choose" their own physicians. Having lived in Communist countries for extended periods of time, I am certainly not in a position to argue for the "freedoms" afforded by those thankfully dead regimes: it is definitely more pleasant to live in a democratic, capitalist-oriented Eastern Europe, despite the uncertainties of the current times. Socialized medicine? No, thank you.

But, then, until this past year I had not experienced a serious family illness. When push came to shove, American "health care" failed miserably and the still-socialized medical system of Poland came to the rescue—saving my wife's life along the way.

Perhaps U.S. health care works fine if one is regularly employed by another: I'm not. My wife, Alina, and I are filmmakers, entrepreneurs in the finest capitalist sense. Which means that our medical insurance coverage sometimes lapses, and we must also constantly seek out affordable premiums rather than stay with a single carrier. Last winter the stress of an armed robbery and the Northridge Earthquake induced an arrhythmic condition in Alina's heart. No problem: we were covered by insurance we had purchased for the film employees. Problem: the insurance company decided the condition was pre-existing. We had a simple choice: pay cash or die—no insurance carrier was going to cover a pre-existing condition that needed immediate, expensive treatment.

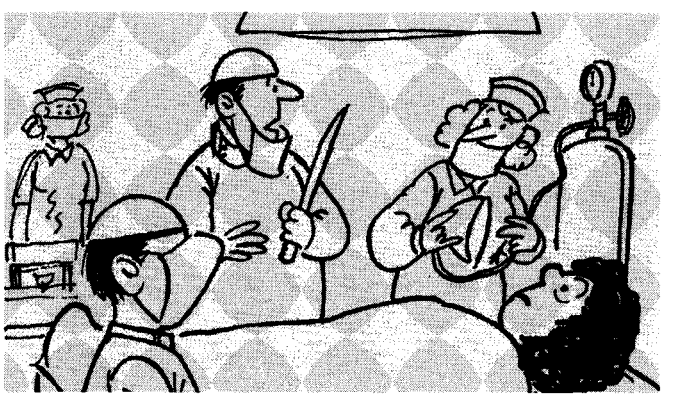
On paper we were quite well off; in fact, every cent was tied up in film and theater productions. Our family physician suggested an ingenious solution: he would check Alina into a local hospital as an "emergency" and force them to care for her under Medi-Cal provisions. Medi-Cal is the California state "safety net" for low-income individuals.

As well-intentioned as the clerk handling our case was, we did not fit any of her required profiles for coverage: nowhere on the list was a category "needs life-saving treatment immediately." A compromise was reached—apparently to the benefit of the hospital, since we had no voice in the matter: Alina would remain in the hospital for observation for the maximum number of days allowed by Medi-Cal for "discretionary emergency" patients. Desperate, we were in no position to disagree.

We should have. Given no choice in the matter, Alina was visited by numerous physicians whom we neither knew nor particularly wanted to see. Few bothered to look at her medical records. One wrote up a "detailed" examination that had lasted less than a minute and involved no physical contact at all. Still another put down a room visit for a day when he was very specifically absent. All charged their services to Medi-Cal separately from the hospital bill, which was clocking in at $1,300 a day.

There were other fun surprises. One symptom involved excessive burping. A gastroenterologist, discovering that Alina was covered by insurance for nonheart symptoms, dispensed with X-rays and physical exam completely—but decided she had an epiglottal ulcer. He scheduled surgery for the next week and was more than a little surprised that we declined the "very necessary operation."

Cowed by the weakness of illness, Alina was unprepared for the haphazard way in which the "American system" works. We



"You won't need the ether mask, nurse, she just wants an estimate."

ROBERT FLEET, *a filmmaker and writer, lives in Montclair, California.*

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assumed that the doctors coordinated their efforts. Ha! Our family physician prescribed a medication to improve heart beat—apparently unaware of tests indicating a failing valve, and that a strengthened heart beat quickens that deterioration. No one bothered to check her medical history. We offered her medical records every time—one doctor went so far as to proclaim with his refusal, "I don't need to look at those, I know what I'm doing!" The doctors, then, were unaware of Alina's iffy liver condition—although each of the medications prescribed in the hospital contained specific warnings against use on liver-sensitive patients.

The final indignity came at check-out. Kept in the hospital for six days, Alina waited on the seventh for either our family doctor or the hospital's "attending" physician to check her out and advise what the next steps would be. Neither one came to the hospital that day. Without a final examination she could not be released and I left in the late afternoon for a far-away business meeting. The hospital administration, however, knew that Medi-Cal would not cover another day—so, while I was on the road, Alina was bundled off to a taxi by nurses, given $10 for the fare, and sent home. The humane doctors providing the "safety net" of public welfare had neither treated her condition properly nor did they bother to tell us the extent of her heart damage. They did, however, bill the state of California $17,000 for their services—including absentee examinations.

We were in limbo. On our own we explored the American health care "system" to discover a number of specialists who insisted that Alina's condition was probably serious, but refused to consider testing or treatment unless payment was received upfront in lieu of insurance. Our family physician, miffed, would qualify Alina for only a month's disability insurance. We endured a half-year's grueling existence of scraping together funds for individual tests that—since American doctors don't consult with one another—seemed to contradict one another.

Coming into a few thousand dollars, repayment of expenses on a past film, we decided on a desperate tactic: go to Poland for testing. An American citizen for years, Alina is Polish by birth. Perhaps she would still qualify for their free socialized medicine? At the very worst, we concluded, medical prices were so low there as to allow us to afford making all of the tests we already knew were out of our reach here. Besides, Alina's condition was deteriorating daily. Thanks to the conflicting opinions of self-interested and half-assed doctors, at that point we did not know if she suffered from valve damage, epiglottal ulcers, or liver cancer.

The financial situation turned out to be somewhere between our best and worst-case scenarios: as an American, Alina was ineligible for Poland's free medical services; however, as doctors pledged to the Hippocratic oath, Polish physicians and hospital administrators felt it their obligation to treat the patient first and then worry about payment.

Poland is not a cheap country: prices have been rising steadily and are comparable to those in Midwestern America. Specific costs for medical expenses changed even as Alina was treated, but it is important to note that she was able to have over $10,000 worth of pre-operation testing and examinations for less than $1,000—a savings primarily attributable to the fact that a hospital room in Poland was charged at $40 per day (raised to $75 per day while we were there). For Polish citizens these costs were covered by state-sponsored insurance.

As in American Health Maintenance Organizations, the Polish system of free socialized health care begins at a local clinic; or, for a small fee, one can go to a physician of individual choice anywhere in the country. With a per capita income considerably lower than Americans enjoy, Poles have approximately the same patient-to-doctor ratio—and actually have fewer patients-per-bed than in the U.S. This is a direct result of their socialized education system: ability, rather than financial resources, is the arbiter of who goes to medical school. Poland consistently produces a fine pool of talented physicians, exported worldwide. One of America's pre-eminent cardiosurgeons, credited with important refinements to the artificial heart valve, was schooled in Poland.

It was to that level of medical service that Alina was recommended then: the Warsaw Cardiological Institute. Clinical teams of consulting physicians are assigned to each patient in a hospital. Alina was visited frequently each day by a primary cardiologist, Dr. Miroslaw Kowalski. Other clinic cardiologists came daily—and all were overseen by a *docent*, Dr. Elzbieta Borowiecka: she examined each patient at least twice weekly. This approach resolved the problem of conflicting opinions we had been given in America by independent specialists, as each Polish physician discussed in daily clinic meetings his or her interpretation of test results; Docent Borowiecka arbitrated conflicting opinions. All aspects of diagnosis were discussed thoroughly with the patient. Later, as it was decided that an operation was needed to replace Alina's damaged mitral valve with an artificial one, the cardiology docent coordinated arrangements with the cardiosurgery clinic's docent—Dr. Andrzej Biderman was Alina's surgeon—and both of them were under the supervision of a *professor*. At the Warsaw Cardiological Institute this professorship is held by the world-renowned author of many medical texts, Dr. Wanda Sadowska. None of these were administrative positions; rather, they were hands-on professionals whose interests in the patients were medical only.

This came to be appreciated ever more greatly as operation day approached. Administrative officials were kept at a distance—the philosophy being that patients and their families supporting them must not be put in stressful situations. This contrasted starkly with the American hospital, where Alina was wheeled into the financial bureau before being examined by an admitting physician; telephone calls from the financial office had outnumbered doctor visits two-to-one.

I had the opportunity to discuss this attitude with various doctors at the Warsaw hospital. Some of those attending Alina had practiced in American hospitals as visiting physicians, ostensibly to learn more modern techniques. There was group horror at how finance dictates treatment in the U.S. As an example, it was suggested Alina have an "electro-version" treatment to alter her postoperation heart filibrations. She was terrified: at

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her L.A. hospital the woman in the next bed had been given the treatment without anesthesia—an anesthesiologist was not covered by her Medicare insurance and she was too poor to pay his fee. It was a painful, groaning experience we witnessed. In Poland the anesthesiologist is a part of the team, regardless; for Alina it was a pleasant, invigorating process. The Warsaw doctors shook their heads, familiar with the payment-dictated policy: They could not understand how American doctors could do this to a patient without anesthesia.

Alina's doctors admitted that several colleagues had returned to the U.S. permanently. No one could deny the lure of the high incomes American physicians earn. That, however, was also why so many elected to stay in Poland: in the United States, medicine is a profession; under a system where socialized medicine still prevails, it is a vocation.

This hit home in a number of small ways. The expected "gifts," for example. We had made a film in Poland eight years earlier; gifts—a.k.a. bribes—were the bane of our existence, as greedy apparatchiks demanded off-the-books "gifts" for services already officially paid. We expected worse in the hospital, since medical services in Poland are virtually free and medical professionals are paid on a scale not higher than the national average. One could—and most patients did—supplement their daily services with gifts to the doctors and nurses. But these are generally on the "give what you can" scale, flowers and wine being the most popular gifts. Nothing was demanded. More than one doctor refused any gift at all until surgery was over and they would be certain that Alina was on the road to recovery.

I feared the dreaded "impersonality" of socialized medicine. I had forgotten that "personality" is an individual characteristic. Yes, there are boors among the Polish medical profession. I certainly did not like Dr. R.'s cigarette hanging out of his mouth every time he emerged from an elevator. (Smoking is banned in hospital, but who is going to stop a doctor in an elevator?) But that was not the point: everything was incredibly human in this "socialized" hospital. The doctors were not holier-than-thou, upper-middle-class, smarter-than-you-can-imagine specialists with a cellular phone constantly ringing in the latest real-estate mortgage rates. (Yes, this cliché did happen to us, almost laughably had not Alina's life been at stake.) Instead, these were men and women who sat down on the edge of a bed and said to the old *babcia*, "*Oy, pani*, I'm sorry but I can only give you a heart that will make you live another fifty years, not a hundred, so you will have to come back to me again then."

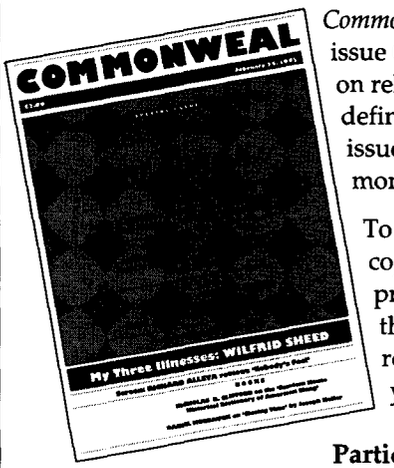
Oh, and yes, they make house calls.

Oh, and yes, they are paid by the hospital—so there is no separate billing from the doctors, radiologists, anesthesiologists, and every third hospital person who talks to you—as there is in the American system.

Anecdote, of course, should not a policy decision make. Yet it is anecdotal terrorism that is used by American health-care providers to denigrate socialized medicine. From this admittedly noncasual observer's perspective, the stories to tell about socialized medicine in Poland are generally positive. We still owe several thousand dollars to the Polish hospital where Alina had her successful heart operation last summer—it was not a socialized freebie for us. Still, the cost has been about a third of what it would have been here.

Ironically, we returned to the U.S. to find a message from one of her American doctors. It was a very kind letter, concerned. It reminded us that Alina's condition was serious and that, as soon as we could make financial arrangements, she should come to him for treatment immediately. Yes, as Bill Clinton conceded in January, health-care reform in America is a dead issue. After all, we have "the best health-care system in the world." □

Religion & the Media



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A WAY OF LIFE IN OLD AGE

START A NEW COMMUNITY

ADÉ BETHUNE

As the years advance, what do I want of life? Only one thing, to make my last years the best of all my life. I am only eighty-one.

Ten years ago, I helped to empty the house of a woman who had died in her nineties. I had never known Eleanor, but the things left behind in her Massachusetts home revealed fragments of her life. She had been widowed for many years. Pictures of her one child, a Down's syndrome little girl who died early, showed that the baby had been cherished. Embroidered bibs, dresses, coverlets, dating back to the 1920s, were carefully stored away in the house.

Eleanor had lived many years with her sister, Grace, who seems to have been the better housekeeper of the two. After Grace died, Eleanor, by then in her eighties, never seems to have summoned the courage to go upstairs any more. The clothes and linens were still perfectly organized, as Grace must have left them, but fifteen years of dust gently covered the furniture and boxes, producing exquisite designs on the dressers beneath the lace runners. Drawers disclosed an unbelievable collection of silk stockings, spanning perhaps seventy years, some still waiting the day they would be mended.

Eleanor had retrenched to the first floor, to an office-den where she slept on a lumpy couch, and to a few square feet of the kitchen. In the dining room, the table was heaped with mounds of dusty things; the buffet, too, the chairs along the walls, and the window sills: all held accumulated layers of boxes, packages, newspapers, some quite recent. The sitting room was slightly more presentable, perhaps because an occasional visitor might have been received.

Eleanor's spartan den revealed that she had been a government bookkeeper and that old age had not diminished her fascination with figures. Quantities of small slips of paper, all dated, gave a meticulous account of every cent spent on each occasion she had entertained visitors with a dish of ice cream at the drug store or taken her car out for errands. Apparently she had renewed her driver's license until the end. Copies of the *Reader's Digest*, many still in their mailing covers, were piled on and around her desk. Perhaps she could no longer read with pleasure. But filling out her expense slips was still important.

ADÉ BETHUNE *is a world-renowned liturgical artist and architectural consultant. She can be contacted at 118 Washington Street, Newport, Rhode Island 02840.*

Eleanor had died after less than a week in the hospital. Her lawyer took care of her affairs. Her estate, worth some thousands of dollars, plus the proceeds from the sale of her house, were to go to an unknown distant relative in Ireland. How much of it ever reached Ireland we can only guess. After all, lawyers' fees can be considerable.

The several days I spent helping to pack things in boxes and to dispose of them for people in need had an emotional impact on me. First, there was the sense that I was invading an unknown person's privacy by having to go through the relics of her life.

Second, I realized how easily I could become entangled in a similar situation. I decided to start giving away my things and the old family furniture before I die, so the things might find a good home and I can still enjoy the pleasure they bring to others.

Third, I began to ponder. Had I known Eleanor, could I have been a friend to her, perhaps made her last years less lonely? I had been a companion to my mother until she died at age ninety-six. Mother and I did not always agree on everything, but we had each other. We could bounce ideas off one another, laugh at funny things, compare notes on the latest caper of the dogs, or the priceless sayings of the grandchildren, and even recall the old stories of Uncle Jim and Uncle Charles. We would go to church together.

Mother had more time and ability to read than I did. She was always propping a book upon the table as she sat knitting; and

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I absorbed its contents as we worked in the kitchen and ate around the table or went to the market for errands. I still miss those good discussions and sharp judgments.

How would it be, I wondered, for older folk to have companions, to live co-operatively, to work out a buddy system where one helps the other and they do not have to be consigned to a nursing institution for sick people?

An idea began to take shape: a community of persons over fifty, who want to shake off loneliness, simplify their private households, and enjoy a richer, more interesting life. People who want to retain their independence, personal responsibility, and the feeling that they are really useful, that others need them. People who can share a bit of humor, or a tip on gourmet cooking while they wash the dishes together, or who inspire others with an interesting idea they have discovered somewhere.

People who volunteer to help each other with little chores: see that one guy does not forget his daily medication; help another to tie a shoelace; help make a bed (it is so much easier for two); offer a ride to another who no longer drives; accept the help of a friend who can type a letter; help organize interest-provoking events.

Perhaps my own father and mother were able to live in good health into advanced age, and to die at home (no hospital for them), because we were there to help each other. Common life may be an important part of preventive medicine.

But common life means nothing if it is not the foundation for a richer personal life. Members of the group need to work together and help each other, but they must also be free to retreat to the privacy of their own individual rooms. That space becomes a symbol of their unique personality, their own world.

They must be free to enjoy silence, to take a nap, to dream, to read quietly, to look out the window and watch the birds, to follow golden vistas in drifting clouds, to pray, to ponder on the wisdom in the Scriptures, to rejoice in the ineffable love of the Divine Spirit.

Last fall I was invited to celebrate the golden wedding of dear friends who were moving to a retirement home. For their guests, Phil and Esther had prepared a quantity of packages, neatly wrapped in brown paper. Each of us was invited to select a mystery package. The jubilarians had decided to reduce their library and were giving most of their books away. They had enjoyed the books, some for over half a century. Now as they relinquished the duty of dusting their books, they were also enjoying vicariously the pleasure and learning that the new owners would find in the volumes' pages. Once again, I resolved to simplify my life.

To simplify one's life is a never-ending task. Is it wise to put it off? Until it is too late?

I know that old age brings its diminishments, aches and pains, sorrows and disappointments; it can bring loneliness, depression. But I find that age is vastly enriched by experience, by memories, friendships, learning new skills, short cuts, freedom to serve others without having to count the cost, a general view that life is short, that petty quarrels, pretense, gossip, and unessentials are not worth the worry.

A lovely day in spring now brings me so much more joy than when I was young. I drink in depth the colors of a singular autumn leaf. To see young people grow and develop fills me with elation. A page, perhaps only a sentence, or a heart-to-heart talk, even with a stranger, can touch base and open vistas deep in my heart.

Everyday work still needs to be done, but its matter-of-fact quality seems to hold all the more meaning. Weeks fly by, too fast to waste on trivialities.

I need to simplify my life, to rejoice in the fleeting days and hours, such as they may be. I need to write my will and sign a durable power of attorney. I must start giving most of my treasures to the younger generation. I want to see my heirs enjoy them while I am still living, enjoy them as I did and still do. I must write my funeral instructions. My very death should proclaim my way of life to those I leave behind. I might live for another twenty years, but I want to be free to live them in the simple style that befits an elder.

Yes, I must simplify my life. I must not leave a mess for others to clean up after I die. I welcome death, whenever she comes, in her own time. She is part of the great gift I owe to my parents, and to their parents before them, that awesome gift, life herself. I must try to leave my earthly life, not as a burden to others, but insofar as possible, as a free gift.

Is all this only a lovely dream? To be realistic, a few friends and I have joined forces and formed a nonprofit corporation, Star of the Sea, in Newport, Rhode Island. We are buying a building, the former Cenacle Retreat House, facing Narragansett Bay. The plan is to renovate it into a community, a senior center, similar to so many in the country. Office, kitchen, dining, sitting rooms, multi-

Anne Porter

Summer Cottage

This is a house that smells of melons and roses
And the sea wind pours through it
And the light curtains
Are always floating
And the airy sprays
Of the sea-lavender
Tremble on the table

And a hushed roar
From the massive ocean
Covers us night and day
It shelters us
Like a tree shadow
We live in it
As in a forest.

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purpose space, storage, exercise room, workshops, a fine library, a greenhouse, etc. The chapel shines with beautiful stained glass. Beneath it is a good hall for lectures, concerts, movies, plays.

The two upper floors will consist of private rooms for residents (each with private bath, geared to age and need), single rooms and some two-room suites, as best fits the needs of particular members. Peculiar nooks and crannies of the old, homey buildings will be preserved. Instead of tearing down these interesting historic structures, we plan to give them new life.

Details. To bring the buildings up to code and meet the Americans with Disabilities Act, everything must be updated from top to bottom: elevator, sprinkler system, fire stairs, ramps. We are also planning for home owners to buy a share of the co-operative enterprise. And we must raise endowment funds for those who cannot afford to buy a share. Economic discrimination must have no place among members who share the same ideal. A mixed-income community. I have a dream!

Today, we are launching into the deep to raise $2.5 million. No dream without its bottom line. Purchase of the property is imminent. One million must be raised in a month. The buildings have suffered neglect. Their structure is sound, but financing for substantial rehabilitation is required. Our board is growing. We are doing a campaign for the Cenacle. □

SCREEN

WAY DOWN UNDER

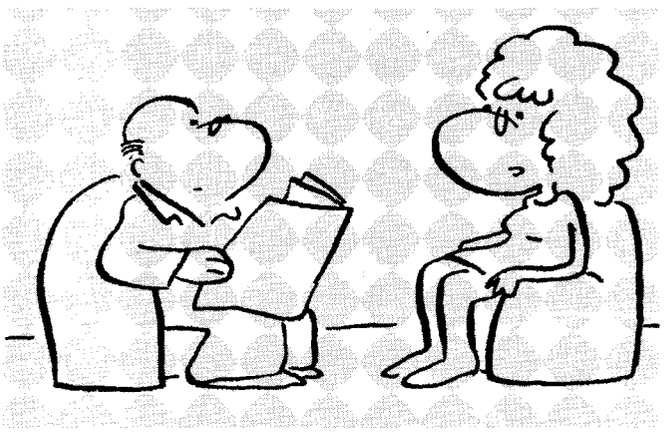
'ONCE WERE WARRIORS'

While watching *Once Were Warriors*, perhaps the most acclaimed movie ever to come out of New Zealand, I kept thinking of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The domestic situation of the Maori couple, Beth and Jake Heke, is roughly the same as Stella and Stanley Kowalski's. She is the descendant of aristocratic warriors, he is a proletarian who pulled his bride off her "pedestal" and secured her complaisance through sheer sexual dominance. Having adjusted to Jake's milieu so well that she now seems part of it, Beth can knock the cap off a beer bottle with magisterial briskness and can out-cuss any of her husband's mates at the all-night drinking bashes held several times a week in the Heke home. And, with her strong arms, earth-goddess voluptuousness, and ear-to-ear grin, Rena Owen's Beth seems, in the early scenes of the movie, a perfect match for the tank-like Jake of Temuera Morrison.

But this is a match made in hell. The Hekes are the Kowalskis after twenty years of marriage and there have been too many drinks, too many brawls, too much brutality. Stanley Kowalski, it may be recalled, was valued by Stella as a good provider, but Jake blithely accepts his latest sacking because the government dole is only a few dollars less than his salary, and, besides, he now has more time for drinking with his buddies. If Stanley, turning ugly at a stag booze-up, cuffs Stella and then shows abject remorse when he sobers up, Jake punches Beth full force in the face for refusing to fry an egg, kicks her in the stomach, and, when he sobers up, complains that the monstrously swollen eye he's given her makes her look ugly. Stanley's remorse led to mutually fervent, tender lovemaking, but Jake concludes his beatings with rape. The Heke children are terrorized, while the two oldest boys are out on the street turning criminal, the others cringe on their beds wailing as the beating goes on and on in the adjoining bedroom. *Once Were Warriors* isn't a repeat of *Streetcar*; it's a disillusioning chastising sequel.

The great strength of this movie is in its texture, in director Lee Tamahori's devotion to getting the details just right. The instability of the Heke home is perfectly mirrored in the Heke house—why clean up when Dad will only wreck everything at the next party? The bracing yet remorseless brightness of New Zealand sunlight, the mixture of macho menace and equally macho conviviality in the working-class bars, the cheerful we've-seen-it-all-before callousness of the white policemen collaring the native delinquents—all this is captured to perfection. Particularly deft is the way the presence of American pop culture in Maori life is shown. The kids listen to rap, while their parents are singing the soft rock of three decades ago with beery nostalgia. On the bodies of Maori gang-bangers are tattoos that both recall aboriginal body-painting and make the kids look like the sci-fi villains of *The Road Warrior*. And consider the *Lethal Weapon* and *White Men Can't Jump* posters on the oldest daughter's bedroom wall. Plenty of transracial male bonding pictured there! White supercop Mel Gibson stands shoulder-to-shoulder with black supercop Danny Glover, and Woody hustles basketball with Wesley. But what does the Heke daughter know of such racial harmony outside the world of pop?

Best of all is the acting of Owen and Morrison, who embody the characters in the most literal sense. They show us how Beth and Jake have lived together for years by showing us how two bodies have been together, slamming into each other, teasing, mocking, loving, and finally instilling revulsion in each other.



"Well, Stanley, has our marriage bottomed out or what?"

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I don't think I've seen such purely kinetic interaction between male and female actors since...well, since Brando and Kim Hunter in *Streetcar*.

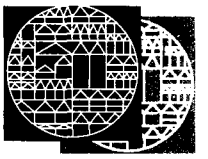
But, though the expert acting and staging have been rightly praised, even more acclaim has been focused on the way the movie's domestic violence points to another theme: the degradation of the Maori culture to which the title alludes. Once there was a nation of great warriors, but now racism and depredations of urban life have reduced the Maoris, or at least segments of them, to what the Hekes have become. But, for me, this was the weakest aspect of the movie.

For one thing, Jake's allusion to the fact that he was descended from native slaves (rather than the Maori chieftains who were Beth's forebears) informs us that this is the source of the inferiority complex that keeps him beer-sodden and brutal. By battering Beth, he is also battering her superior social standing. I'm willing to accept this as the motivation of an individual, but am I also to take Jake as representative of an entire class? Apparently so, since the only men of his class in this movie are shown as utter brutes while all the women are potential or actual victims who know they're supposed to "keep their mouths shut and their legs open." Conversely, when Beth's parents and siblings (the descendants of noble warriors) show up for a granddaughter's funeral, they are well-dressed, well-mannered, elegant of speech, self-respecting, loving, and humane. Are we to think that *only* the descendants of the Maori warrior-caste can inevitably thrive as long as they stay in touch with their traditions, while other natives are doomed to squalor and violence because their slave ancestry gives them no tradition to honor and uphold?

The movie seems to assent to this by showing that one of the Heke boys, sent to reform school, undergoes rehabilitation only because an instructor makes him and other boys learn tribal chants and martial disciplines. I well understand the value of instilling racial pride into delinquents, but when the teacher promises to show the boy how to use his mind as a weapon, I had to wonder how the tribal rituals were going to serve as the basis for intellectual accomplishment. It's not that I doubt that it *could* happen, it's just that the moviemakers' automatic assumption that it *would* happen left me skeptical.

In fact, there is a romantic swooniness about ethnic pride that brings *Warriors* close to a sort of intraracial racism. Jake, the descendant of slaves, will always remain a slave (to drink, to his passions), but Beth, descendant of free warriors, has only to return to her parents and her caste to become a proud, self-respecting woman again. That Beth leaves Jake for good is humanly and dramatically justified by the fact that he has indirectly caused the death of one of their children. But, after twenty years of marriage, will it really be so easy for her to make the break, to wash that part of her that has become so much like him out of her system? The moviemakers seem to think so. This programmatic attitude is what makes the concluding scenes of this otherwise brilliant film relatively mechanical. It's as if Tennessee Williams had decided that Blanche Dubois was right when she called Stanley Kowalski a dumb Polack.

RICHARD ALLEVA



COMMONWEAL

The Next Generation

There is a time to sow, and a time to reap. Or so we have been told by those who have successfully handed on from generation to generation a 5,000-year-old biblical tradition. That's an example of fiduciary responsibility we at *Commonweal* would like to emulate.

But the magazine cannot reap what is not sown. Now is the time for those who believe in *Commonweal* to sow the financial seeds that will enable the magazine to pass its tradition on to the next generation...and the next.

That requires stability. For that reason we are establishing an endowment fund. Our goal is to raise $1 million over the next three years. And we hope to raise the money the old-fashioned way—by asking for your help.

The endowment fund will supplement (not replace) the annual appeal to the Commonweal Associates. The endowment campaign will focus on larger gifts and asset transfers through financial instruments such as remainder trusts, charitable annuities, and insurance policies. Such philanthropic gifts can be a financial benefit to the giver, often allowing a tax deduction while interest on the asset is paid. For *Commonweal*, and for the larger commonweal, we trust the intangible return on such gifts will be larger still.

Commonweal has been called "perhaps the most significant lay enterprise...in the history of American Catholicism." That achievement was sown by the tireless work of Catholic families, parishes, priests and religious, and colleges and universities that produced a vibrant and confident Catholic culture and intellectual life. But that church and that world have changed. If a vital Catholic intellectual culture is to continue, new ways must be found to support and encourage its expression. Will you help?

Please have Dennis O'Brien, endowment chair, call me. My name and phone number:

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God's battered body

WILLIAM SIMPSON

Our common life is enriched, entertained, and befogged, in about equal measure, by the many religious services designed to worship God and celebrate the blue-green earth. They are often long on inspiration and short on clarity. Mutterings overheard from two such meetings are worth repeating: "Isn't this the only subject that neither Andy Greeley nor Harvey Cox has written a book about? What can that mean?" And from a weary celebrant, forty-five minutes into an impromptu prayer by a Native American chief that included an impassioned creation dialogue between the Sacred Acorn and the Great Squirrel, "Can't anybody here announce a fade-out to a station break?"

No one did. The prayers ended when the inspiration was complete, and the service dragged toward closure well into its third hour.

Likewise with many writings and teaching about religion and the environment. How long will it be before we know what we're talking about?

One of the most lucid and powerful metaphors of our time is theologian Charles Hartshorne's panentheistic claim, "The world is God's body." Hartshorne left the body side of that formulation for empirical thinkers to explore and elaborate. Scientists tell us that nature, or God's body, is littered with evolutionary failures and the energies of innovation, flagrant with symptoms of stress and quite elusive in its systemic coherence and norms of "health," if these can be found at all.

A few years ago a very competent environmental journalist and author of the best-selling *A Moment on Earth* (Viking), Gregg Easterbrook, published an essay, "Everything You Know about the Environment Is Wrong," and listed thirty-seven issues that need to be reformulated for public understanding and policy deliberation. A careful tracking of research, argument, and advocacy for more than a decade in three much-respected journals—*Nature, Science,* and *Environment*—shows that somewhat more than thirty subject matters constitute the environment and the ecology of it. Fewer than half of those environmental issues have surfaced on the horizons of our political culture, and fewer still have ever been in the news.

Religious advocates, of course, need not jump directly into this empirical world and try to thrash a path toward a universe scientifically understood. Many essays in these volumes move from scriptural, doctrinal, or liturgical frameworks toward persuasive conclusions about environmental matters.

In *Preserving the Creation*, Richard Clifford presents a most useful synoptic collection of biblical cosmogenic narratives and myths about the natural world, the human status in it, and divine relatedness to both. Gabriel Daly analyzes the many different methods, in modern and contemporary thought, by which creation theologies are built, and Elizabeth Johnson replies with a sharply measured critique of the patriarchal and monarchical assumptions built into such religious thought. Daniel Cowlin projects how a possible environmental ethic can build on, and must dissent from, Catholic ethical traditions.

In *Ecological Challenge*, Dianne Bergant directs a programmatic reading of the prophet Hosea at the most contentious issue now being argued in environmental philosophy: "It [the Book of Hosea] resists any kind of anthropocentric imperialism and, instead, celebrates the intrinsic, not merely the instrumental, value of nature."

In *Worldviews and Ecology*, eight essays elaborate cosmologies and nature doctrines in traditional religions that will not easily conform to the command for a single "global ethic." Many of these essayists demonstrate how the vocabulary and drama of liturgical and contemplative theology can reconstruct the human experience of creation through symbolic structure and sacramental order.

Three ad hoc essays in *Embracing Earth* also deserve wide reading and comment. David Toolan argues that recent Vatican positions need to better comprehend the three-legged character of current environmental dilemmas: the rich nations must alter their polluting structures, the poor nations must reckon with too many people fighting over too little land and water, and the church has to deal directly and honestly with women's reproductive rights.

Books discussed in this essay

The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, and Spiritual Responses, *Richard N. Fragomeni and John T. Pawlikowski, eds., The Liturgical Press, $9.95, 140 pp.*

Preserving the Creation: Environmental Theology and Ethics, *Kevin W. Irwin and Edmund Pellegrino, eds., Georgetown University Press, $40, 153 pp.*

Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology, *Albert J. LaChance and John E. Carrol, eds., Orbis Books, $18.95, 280 pp.*

Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy and the Environment, *Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grimm, eds., Orbis Books, $16.95, 246 pp.*

WILLIAM SIMPSON *loves the environment while riding the D Train to and from the Bronx and Fordham University, where he teaches a course on religion and ecological issues.*

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Richard C. Haas turns the traditional Catholic work ethic toward a new look at economic productivity problems, using a richly argued set of analogies between sexual relationships and work-production-reward relationships, wherein he sees the basis for a new economic spirituality. And Albert Fritsch makes a most intelligent and discerning argument that technologies capable of liberating masses of human beings from famine, disease, and untimely death can also be appropriate for healing the damage caused by abusive technologies. These three essays exemplify the refreshing theological initiatives that can and ought to emerge from the churches and independent associations.

Unfortunately, the conventional wisdom of journalists and environmental activists is also saturated with antitechnology rhetoric. The damnation of "technological man" follows the conversion to naturalism as logically as the wearing of wilderness clothes and eating organic food. Several of these liturgical theologians, along with Fritsch, make a subtle and powerful counterclaim. Bread and wine are "manufactured symbols," made by working hands that manipulate the ancient technologies of the flour grinding stone, the oven, and that manage the vineyards and learn the techniques of fermentation. Thus the simplest, most profound symbols central to the Eucharist embody both human technology and divine grace. It makes about as much sense for a believing Christian to engage in a diatribe against technology as it does for a practicing Jew to decide that the Torah yields more wisdom when read in the dark, so therefore we should eliminate electricity and the symbols of light from public life.

Liturgy, and the reflection it inspires, should not be underestimated as a means of environmental appreciation. Two of the shorter essays deserve more extended argument.

In *Worldviews and Ecology*, Charlene Sprepmak makes an heroic effort to summarize in eight pages the argument, myth-making, and spirituality practiced in more than fifty sources of ecofeminist writing and teaching. Ecofeminism argues that two kinds of dualistic thinking are the engines that impose domination and death on nature. One is the mind-body dualism that shattered the medieval synthesis, but left untouched its hierarchical patterns of rule; the other is masculine-feminine dualism that promotes rationality, spirit, culture, autonomy, assertiveness, and the public sphere as the masculine arena, and relegates the feminine to emotion, the body, nature, connectedness, receptivity, and the private sphere. One political consequence of these dualisms is that all current efforts at environmental protection, conservation, and restoration merely replicate and expand masculine domination and control, and stand condemned as false moral abstractions, ruinous to nature, and oppressive to the integrity of women.

To reconstruct an ethic of nature, ecofeminists seek "to remove the concepts of rights from the central position it currently holds and focus instead on less dualistic concepts such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship, and responsibility." Human beings can reliably comprehend the holistic totality because of "felt connections" with all levels and all regions of creaturely experience, but especially "between the person, the family, the community, the bioregion, the country, other people, other species, Earthbody, and the cosmos." Logical connections among these segments of experience are most readily available in the feminine experience and the resonant harmonies of nature. And from this great communion, a new spirituality is born.

Ecofeminist teaching invites at least four kinds of reflection. First, it is a genuine attempt to develop an empirical theology, an understanding of the world's relatedness to God based on worldly experience as such. It shares this pioneer status with feminist theology more generally.

Second, it is massively reductionistic, both in the minute samples of biotic experience it attends to, and in the methods of projecting universal or "holistic" meaning from that evidence to the totality and history of God's body. Rachel Carson's graceful quote, "There is an ecology of the world in our bodies," often cited by ecofeminists, is an insight that ignores far more about the world's life systems than it can possibly reveal.

Third is the problem of how the feminist communion with nature can give birth to the elective power of moral judgment, how to make the logical turn from the appreciative "is" to the effective "ought." Among those felt connections with all creaturely experience are nature's two most effective killers, the malaria virus and the *schistosoma mansonis*, a parasite worm that kills vast numbers of warm-blooded creatures as well as humans. If these diseases are to be contained and destroyed, to what level of technical and divine order must we appeal for effective action? The principled move from nature's collaborator to ethical teacher and local enforcer cannot be delivered friction-free by ecofeminist interpretations of the holistic experience.

And four, the great communion, the feminist harmonic community of all creations, is in practice a pristine case of cloistered virtue. For most human beings and other sentient life forms, nature is a harsh and relentless taskmaster that offers no recess from the struggle to live, thrive, and find some happiness. The new spirituality taught by ecofeminists can transform only a very few creatures who are predisposed to practice and enjoy the rites of such a belief. It is a very good example of what Martin Luther meant by faith without works.

From ecofeminists we can expect novel, melodic, instructive myths and rituals about how the world is ordered, presided over by Madame Polyarchia, in the company of her attendants Hymnia, Calliope, Terpischore, and their ensemble, who will frolic out of the great Womb into a species-rich green meadow shaded by a climax forest, to join in treble songs, body choreography, and the feasting on ripe fruits and poetry. These myths may not promise the redemption of the whole world, but they do promise a lot more fun, and are a welcome relief from all that recycled philosophy. But one reads ecofeminist writing with a murmured benediction, that God might lead them deeper into the valleys of Darwin, and DNA, and the flight of time's arrow, for Her name's sake.

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Moreover, there is the apocalyptic premise that animates a very large proportion of speech and activity about the environment. We are now locked in a countdown toward the total destruction of nature and the doomsday of humanity, to be fulfilled at some unknown but unavoidable future moment, triggered by human processes that we cannot stop or will not deter from their projected conclusion. A recent Audubon Society membership letter urged increased support because we can "project with some accuracy the eventual end of the world as we know it. That is, no trees. No wildlife." In an essay in *Worldviews and Ecology*, Larry Rasmussen quotes Gregory Bateson on the human situation, "...your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in Hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or simply, of overpopulation and overgrazing." He then adds, "In my judgment, Bateson is right," and adopts the summary phrase, "aiding and abetting ecocatastrophe."

This brief essay is not consistent with Rasmussen's other writings, but it is replicated many times in World Council of Churches statements, for whom Rasmussen serves as an academic consultant. And Elizabeth Johnson opens her lectures *Women, Faith, Creator Spirit* (Paulist Press, 1993) with the question "whether life, our own and that of future generations, as well as that of myriad living creatures, will flourish on this planet or will pathetically diminish, even disappear." Her answer to this question is the metaphor "earth is entering into its passion and death...."

Reliance on the apocalyptic premise is one of the most careless and obscurantist moves that environmental groups have made. Most especially, religious groups and theological advocates should hold this framework at arm's length, and examine its substance with the same dialectical logic and analytic detail that the doctrine of creation has received. The apocalyptic premise brings with it these difficulties.

First, the rhetorical use of eschaton seems to be borrowed from antiwar politics and nuclear disarmament analysis. In that political context, end-of-the-world imagery is commensurate with the planned exchange of thousands of nuclear weapons. However, our political life is not now driven by the military doctrine of mutually assured destruction. But environmental crisis thought is still dominated, not by obsolete images, but by a grammar designed to contain single-issue convictions that can be "proven" by data from a single source—too often a collection of photographs, or a few case studies from the Worldwatch Institute. The world's life structures are not unitarian, or trinitarian, or in conformity to chiastics or an

"A gang of environmental extremists broke into the house and recycled everything!"

eightfold path. Contemporary prophets who claim to know the causation of nature's imminent end are almost certainly wrong.

A second problem is bluntly political. For more than a decade the editorial opinionizers in the *Wall Street Journal*, along with the Heritage Foundation and numerous other sources of political conservatism, have been hammering away at environmental advocates, charging that they indulge in irrational doomsday visions. More than half the time opinionizers are correct in that claim. But in their high dudgeon these conservative magi conveniently overlook the argument of born-again former Secretary of the Interior James Watt, that Jesus will come again soon so the world doesn't need legal protection or environmental care. And they indulge in their own fantasy logic, that if freed from government restrictions, investors will get rich from "cleaning up the environment."

Environmental groups have deliberately sustained and championed the apocalyptic premise because of its rhetorical efficacy. But they preached their way into a political trap, by hiring public relations agencies who use it as a "values frame" for staging mass media events and for shaping appeals for political and financial support. So the procorporate conservatives have easily identified and condemned this reasoning as more evidence of the bizarre unreality of political liberalism as such. The consequence has been a grotesque distortion of the political geography on which environmental issues must be argued, and a serious defeat for many environmental groups in a policy contest which they mistakenly thought was about public relations. Understanding and acting to protect the environment must rely on truth, discovered through science, politics, and belief. Doomsday images obscure all three areas.

Religious communities are not strangers to apocalyptic belief nor to the rhetoric and actions inspired by it. In *The Ecological Challenge*, John Pawlikowski states some critical cautions that will help us avoid this swamp. And then his colleague, Paul Wadell, in the same volume, wades right into it and flails about with the strange philosophy that fear of an unknown doom can be the principle for ethical analysis and political action, so "Let the facts frighten us....[and] fear free us...."

There are alternatives. Anne Primavesi in *From Apocalypse to Genesis* (Fortress Press, 1991) and Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Gaia and God* (Harper & Row 1989), are intelligent exceptions to giving contemporary green apocalyptics a carte blanche to assemble the vocabulary and stage-manage the future history of environmental action. Unfortunately, the theology of God's body, and a working democracy of a world filled with life, appear to be well beyond the horizon at the moment. □

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Every woman's fantasy

LADDER OF YEARS
Anne Tyler
Alfred A. Knopf, $24, 326 pp.

Gene H. Bell-Villada

In her thirteenth novel, *Ladder of Years*, Anne Tyler continues to be our foremost poet of family life. Her eye and ear for the intimate textures of day-to-day parenthood, aunthood, mother-in-lawhood, and every conceivable kinship tie remain as sharp and reliable as ever.

There's a special sensibility that typifies Tyler fiction. The world of her books is as wondrously *ordinary* as her suburban Baltimore can be, and her talent for conjuring up everyday misadventures seems without limit. A wistfulness pervades much of her writing, and the banal dysfunctionalities of her imagined clans can at times unsettle readers. Yet her tough intelligence helps forestall any undue sentimentality; and her smiling, uncondescending irony makes her a supremely comic novelist. (The nostalgic title of her best-known book, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, is actually a joke: the fabled dinner never materializes.) It's as if the best of Jane Austen, Chekhov, and the Prague filmmakers of the 1960s were rolled into one.

One of the miracles of Tyler's art is her having fashioned a world in which there are no villains. Her generous cast of characters includes folks who are unpleasant or manipulative or rigid, though none are evil. There are neglectful parents, unappreciative spouses, cocky teen-agers—but no truly bad people. And yet, somehow, there's not a hint of the Pollyanna in her outlook. Moreover, almost everybody in her work is recognizably American—WASP American, at that, with few foreigners or other ethnics. Nevertheless, the biographical blurbs routinely mention Tyler's postgraduate work in Soviet studies, her onetime post as Duke University's Russian bibliographer, and her marriage to an Iranian psychiatrist. Clearly she is no American provincial, her art no cheerful celebration of things American. This is not Norman Rockwell; nor is it her fellow Baltimorean, moviemaker John Waters—neither Utopia nor grotesquerie. Her wise genius is that she makes us readers feel, "Yes, that's how life is."

Life in *Ladder of Years* takes an odd turn when its protagonist, Delia (for "Cordelia") Grinstead, on a summer's day with her family on a Delaware beach, acts on a sudden whim. Those minute domestic tensions have been mounting. Her smart, aloof physician husband doesn't take her very seriously, and she chances to find out a distasteful fact about their early courtship. Meanwhile her three nearly grown children blithely disregard her casual talk and parental counsel; and her two older sisters (she is a Cordelia, after all) beset her with their own idiosyncrasies. Her next of kin can't even recall the vital data about her physique and clothing (for opening lines of the novel, *see,* box).

BALTIMORE WOMAN DISAPPEARS DURING FAMILY VACATION

Delaware State Police announced early today that Cordelia F. Grinstead, 40, wife of a Roland Park physician, has been reported missing while on holiday with her family in Bethany Beach.

Mrs. Ginstead was last seen around noon this past Monday walking south along the stretch of sand between Bethany and Sea Colony....

A slender, small-boned woman with curly or light-brown hair, Mrs. Grinstead stands 5'2" or possibly 5'5" and weighs either 90 or 110 pounds. Her eyes are blue or gray or perhaps green, and her nose is mildly sunburned in addition to being freckled.

—Anne Tyler
Ladder of Years

And so, without premeditation or bitterness, Delia simply walks away from the shore, hitches a ride with a workman, and, equally randomly, gets off at a little town just a couple of hours outside Baltimore, name of Bay Borough.

There she finds a barebones room in a boarding house, lands a secretarial job at the town's only law office, takes her meals at a local diner, and eventually settles down as a housekeeper and caregiver for a sad school principal (abandoned by his own wife) and his spunky adolescent son. During the fourteen months spanned by the plot, Delia in her new incarnation will make lots of friends, and enjoy it all the more when her sisters, spouse, and children track her down yet make no special effort at winning her back to the fold.

With minimal experience outside of her home and suburb (her husband and she have lived in the very same house she'd grown up in), Delia now becomes the wide-eyed *naïf* to whom things happen, and her little adventures on the road—or rather on the tiny Main Street—are many. The entire action is narrated from her viewpoint; in a kind of gentle picaresque, she encounters dozens of people of all ages and types, every one of them colorful and quite memorable. In the end, however, it is her motherly and wifely virtues that enable Delia to grow into a functioning, even

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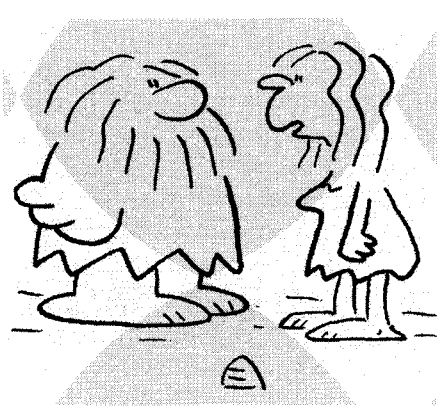
fulfilled member of her adopted community.

Suddenly, just when she seems poised to consider new romantic and even familial ties, Delia receives word of her daughter's impending marriage, and so heads back to Baltimore for a day or two. Once there, she walks into a classic wedding crisis, but unprepossessingly takes charge, happens to meet an entire gallery of still newer folk, and—the inevitable—finds herself literally confronted with having to choose between her new life and her old. Delia's choice, and her reasons why, show Tyler's narrative sorcery at its best.

Just about every page of *Ladder of Years* contains bright, sparkling dialogue and luminous, stray observations—as when Delia's latest acquaintance, a sexy, blonde TV weatherwoman, makes a sharp turn in her car and "brake[s] for a jaywalking collie." At one point, undecided as to whether to drop in at home for Christmas, Delia wonders, "Oh, why wasn't there an etiquette book for runaway wives?" Delia gives her pet cats sturdy men's names like "Vernon" and "George," which leads to some amusing confusion with a feline's human namesake. The title itself comes from the philosophical monologue of a feisty, sixty-seven-year-old retirement-home resident (and happy father of a newborn boy): "See, I've always pictured life as one of those ladders you find on playground sliding boards—a sort of ladder of years where you climb higher and higher, and then, *oops*!, you fall over the edge and others move up behind you." If you tote *Ladder of Years* to the beach this summer, you'll have good company and, most assuredly, won't want to walk away.



"Now that the kids have all grown up and moved out, dear, maybe we could evolve a little."

By mid-May, *Ladder of Years* was high on the *New York Times* best-seller list, sharing space with John Grisham and Robert James Waller. In the wasteland that American culture seems intent on becoming, Anne Tyler's subtle, humane craft stands as a necessary counter to the likes of them and what they stand for. □

HIGH CHURCH FROLICS

ABSOLUTE TRUTHS
Susan Howatch
Knopf, $25, 564 pp.

Celia Wren

The world of Susan Howatch's Starbridge series—six novels about spiritual dilemmas and human theatrics within the Church of England—is populated by a cast of excitable, theologically informed Anglicans, most of them very earnest and a large portion of them ordained. Over the course of the four decades described in *Glittering Images, Glamorous Powers*, and their sequels, these characters interact with the tumultuous life of Starbridge cathedral (modeled on the cathedral in the town of Salisbury, where Howatch once lived), and thrash out relationships as byzantine as any to be found in a soap opera. The resultant conflicts and scandals can verge on the melodramatic, but Howatch gives them an intellectual resonance by making her characters view their experience in terms of sin, redemption, and mystical challenge.

In *Absolute Truths*, the long but extremely entertaining last volume of the sequence, Howatch turns once more to the narrator of the first one: Charles Ashworth, a scholar of early church history who has reluctantly abandoned academia in order to become bishop of Starbridge. Self-aware, well-intentioned, but not entirely charitable, Ashworth has gained a name for himself by championing conservative values, especially those condemning homosexuality, divorce, and premarital sex. In terms of churchmanship, he has embraced the Anglican "Middle Way," which unites the church's Anglo-Catholic and Protestant wings, and he has learned to mediate when the two traditions battle within his diocese, as they so often do.

By 1965, the year in which *Absolute Truths* is set, Ashworth has much to be proud of, or so it seems. He has rescued the Starbridge theological seminary, and kept a pornographic sculpture out of the churchyard. He has fought to an uneasy truce with the cathedral's irrepressible dean, an overly creative fund-raiser Ashworth terms a "tough little ecclesiastical gangster." He is married to the generous Lyle, a perfect bishop's wife, and he sometimes has time to work at his books on early church conflicts. True, he is still bothered by the hostility of his biological son, Michael, who is taking advantage of 1960s' permissiveness, and by the priggish manners of his adopted son, Charley. But even Ashworth, so conscious of appearances, knows the lives of bishops can only seem perfect.

Though he does not realize it, he has allowed himself to wallow in complacency, but his state of spiritual sloth is not to last. "God stood by and watched me for some time," he will say when he looks back on the events described in this volume. "Then in 1965 he saw the chance to act, and seizing me by the scruff of the neck he began to shake me loose from the suffocating folds of my self-satisfaction, my arrogance, and my pride."

Subsequent cataclysms fall thick and fast—a little too fast for complete verisimilitude. No sooner has one disaster progressed to the vestry, in Howatch's fictional world, than another is clamoring on the porch. Deaths, seduction, fraud,

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hysterical sons, mild blackmail, and a secret cache of pornography contrive to batter Ashworth into such confusion that not even thinking sour thoughts about the third-century "sexually lax" Bishop Callistus can give him any comfort. Ashworth's time of trial yields brisk but not completely frivolous reading. Making her story work harder than pure entertainment demands, Howatch arranges events in such a way that they carry out a dramatic examination of Ashworth's favorite Bible quotation, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

"I think that's the most infuriating sentence Saint Paul ever wrote," says Lyle, whom Ashworth learns, too late, has overtaken him in a journey of faith. "Why have you taken to writing it over and over again on your blotter?" The scribbled sentence on the blotter, it turns out, is the second of the "absolute truths" that Ashworth holds dear, the first being that such truths exist at all. Having made its mark on the title, the phrase keeps turning up as a leitmotif until Ashworth surrenders his claim to certainty, and recognizes the darkness that has invaded the life of his beloved cathedral.

Starbridge's architectural masterpiece itself becomes more and more sinister as Ashworth learns that the familiar can present a spiritual threat. After years of depending on his fascinating advisor, Jon Darrow, a former monk with psychic powers, the devastated bishop finds more help in the mysterious and slightly disheveled Lewis Hall, a priest who dreams of founding a healing center. Hall is not only divorced—he also, to Ashworth's horror, likes to wander around the vicarage without socks. Nevertheless, Hall's interest in exorcism—a practice the bishop regards with some skepticism—proves invaluable when Ashworth senses a demonic presence within the cathedral.

In this eerie vision, which comes complete with a ghost, the cathedral seems to be "a monster from some medieval bestiary, a Leviathan hostile to mankind." As the baroque imagery suggests, it takes a real shock to persuade Howatch's characters to release the emotional baggage they've lugged through the years—the old slights, failed loves, the guilt at betrayals of the church. By the end of the book, though, most negative insights have led to positive ones, and the beleaguered Ashworth, at least, has come to terms with the imperfections and absurdities of the present.

Even in moments of psychological strain, Howatch's articulate characters maintain a level of witty and opinionated banter. The repartee can be a little farfetched, but it isn't any harder to accept than the book's slightly creaky plot machinery, which favors characters who phone or turn up on the doorstep solely for the purposes of dropping choice bits of gossip.

It is worth suspending disbelief on both points, though, for the sake of Howatch's wry prose and her impressive ability to string together five-hundred-pages' worth of spiritual and familial crises. *Absolute Truths* does not require a knowledge of previous books in the Starbridge series, and can be delightful if you don't mind entertainment with a theological tinge. □

RESIDENCE HALL RECTOR

University of Notre Dame

The University of Notre Dame is a Roman Catholic University founded by the Congregation of Holy Cross. Approximately 6,550 of the 7,600 undergraduates live in 25 single-sex residence halls on campus.

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A SEPARATION OR A DIVORCE?

RELIGION AND AMERICAN EDUCATION
Rethinking a National Dilemma
Warren A. Nord
University of North Carolina Press, $19.95, 453 pp.

PAYING THE WORDS EXTRA
Religious Discourse in the Supreme Court of the United States
Winnifred Fallers Sullivan
Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, $24.95, 212 pp.

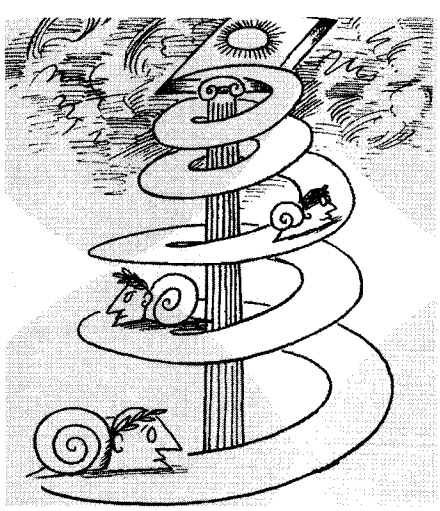
John T. McGreevy

Neutrality has become a complicated word. This was not always true. In 1947, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black confidently asserted that the government's primary duty with respect to religious belief was to avoid passing laws which "aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another." Another justice used the phrase "strict and lofty neutrality as to religion." The issue at hand, whether taxpayers should provide children attending Catholic schools with bus transportation, did spark great controversy, but the principle outlined by the Court, that governmental bodies must remain neutral with regard to religion, quickly became legal orthodoxy.

Warren Nord's thoughtful analysis of religion's role in public education reflects an emerging dispute over exactly what the term "neutral" entails. Nord persuasively argues that educators in public institutions exclude religious points of view. At times this exclusion means ignoring the ways in which religion continues to shape human behavior and history. More frequently, teachers, textbook authors, and administrators assume religion's irrelevance. They proclaim that humans are wholly self-interested beings (in economics courses), that evolution is purposeless (in biology courses), and that students must decide, by themselves, what positions to hold on such controversial matters as sexual behavior or drug use. All of these claims, Nord points out, exist in some tension with the normative judgments made each week in many churches and synagogues. The cumulative result is an implicit endorsement of unbelief, a message to students that religious faiths merely reflect personal, seemingly irrational, choices.

Nord's basic thrust will be familiar to *Commonweal* readers. Stephen Carter's treatment of law and religion, *The Culture of Disbelief*, asked liberals not to close the door to religiously inspired arguments in the public realm; George Marsden has recently argued that universities need to consider religious points of view in a genuinely multicultural curriculum. Nord's contribution to this literature is a remarkably clear account of the secularization of modern intellectual life. In just a few chapters, Nord ranges from Descartes to the modern university, distilling a vast philosophical and historical literature.

What also makes *Religion and American Education* distinctive is its reformist zeal. (Relatively few treatments of Kant and Hegel also include content analyses of home economics textbooks used in North Carolina schools.) Nord proposes a required course in religion for all high school students. Students would read texts from the major religious traditions, become aware of religious approaches to knowledge, and use theology as a backdrop for analysis of contemporary problems. Children in elementary school would develop "religious literacy," while colleges would place the study of religion near the center of a liberal arts education.



These proposals are not unreasonable. Nord's tone throughout the book is measured, and he evenhandedly evaluates objections to his curricular reforms. Even so, Nord's conviction that "religion" courses will counter the secularization of American education reflects a teacher's instinctive turn toward course syllabi when confronted with a social problem. American schools are increasingly diverse. Pity the instructor charged with surveying even the "major" religious traditions represented in her classroom, leaping from Augustine to the Qur'an to the Plains Indians to Joseph Smith, all between January and June, and in the hope that Thursday's class will not be canceled for a pep rally. The cacophony of contradictory voices present in any such course would seem to reenforce, not dispel, the notion of any religious tradition as one in a series of name brands. The considerable virtue of such classes is their ability to reduce ignorance, but only churches and synagogues themselves—through liturgy, religious education, and other means—can present faith traditions as ways of life, not simply sets of propositions.

Frustration with contemporary notions of neutrality also marks Winnifred Fallers Sullivan's interpretation of a 1983 Supreme Court decision, *Lynch* v. *Donnelly*. The Court's majority opinion, authored by Chief Justice Warren Burger, permitted city officials in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, to construct a Christmas crèche in the hope of luring holiday shoppers downtown. A crèche in modern America, Burger maintained, merely acknowledged a secular holiday. Aid to religion was "indirect, remote, and incidental." Justice Sandra Day O'Connor agreed with the result but offered her own reasoning, while Justice William Brennan's bitter dissent termed the crèche a "distinctively sectarian" symbol, one that unacceptably breached the

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wall separating church from state.

For Sullivan, these differing opinions prove that "the separation of church and state... is, as conceived in the language and culture of the writers of the Constitution, impossible." Warren Burger looks at a crèche and sees a generic holiday symbol. William Brennan finds a marker of the Incarnation. Judges thus become theologians, and public discussion of religion speeds toward unresolvable shouting matches.

Sullivan's diagnosis is astute, as is her careful reading of each justice's opinion. Her remedy is less clear. More than any particular result she advocates a sort of legal anthropology, with judges self-consciously attempting to view religion in the eye of the particular beholder, not treating it as a static phenomenon. Easier said, one might add, than done, especially if legal opinions are to avoid resembling term papers in history of religion courses. Sullivan's own mock effort in *Lynch* v. *Donnelly*, for example, concludes with the less than ringing charge that "government [should] resist any religious expression that reifies a particular interpretation of what religion is...." That is, the crèche must go.

Like Nord, however, Sullivan shrewdly identifies a fault line running through much of contemporary American society and intellectual life. Fifty years ago, most judges and educators agreed that religion, whatever it was, needed to be barred from public institutions. Metaphorical walls were understood to separate church from state. As young people spend more time in school, however, and as federal courts become involved in a greater range of questions, it becomes evident that segregation of religion, and religion alone, is itself a theological position. That some analysts could contemplate vouchers for parents whose children attend private schools, but draw the line at vouchers for parents whose children attend private, *religious* schools seems to prove the point. Neither Sullivan nor Nord thinks government should promote prayer in the schools, or build nativity scenes. (And Nord expresses reservations about school-voucher programs.) What they do request is a more sophisticated conversation about these matters, a conversation that both authors do a good deal to advance. □

FOR MORE PERFECT UNIONS

COPPER CRUCIBLE
How the Arizona Miners' Strike of 1983 Recast Labor-Management Relations in America
Jonathan Rosenblum
ILR Press, $16.95, 264 pp.

John Buell

When the Reagan "revolution" began fifteen years ago, its academic apologists assured us that "unleashing the private sector" would lead to greater wealth for all. Perhaps we would have to put up with a little more inequality, but a rising tide lifts all boats. In fact, growth over this period was substantially slower than during the preceding "liberal" era. Even more significantly, quality of life, measured in terms of security, opportunities for personal and professional growth in one's work, and time for family and other leisure pursuits have declined even more markedly for many.

Jonathan Rosenblum's *Copper Crucible*, the story of Phelps Dodge's successful attempt in 1983 to bust its union, is a powerful case study of what Reaganomics meant in one Arizona mining community. During sixteen years of union representation, these mostly Mexican-American workers had been able to negotiate wages equal to those of most factory workers. With that came a chance for modest homes. At least as important was the dignity gained through such basic amenities as a lunchroom so that they would not have to eat sandwiches coated with the soot from the mill.

Following a slump in international copper prices, Phelps Dodge demanded a rollback of wages. When that was not accepted, the company quickly hired permanent replacement workers. Eventually the union was decertified, and in the process many long-term bonds within the community were shattered amid much violence. Most significantly, liberal governor Bruce Babbitt deployed state troopers

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to protect the replacement workers.

This successful use of strikebreakers, aided by a series of National Labor Relations Board decisions, has helped to rewrite the labor-management relations of the last decade. Just as important in fostering these workplace changes, however, has been the larger public attitudes toward unions and replacement workers, a theme about which Rosenblum might have said more.

Popular ambivalence or even resistance to unions has allowed corporate leadership to roll back an implicit accord which had governed much of labor relations in major industries since World War II. That accord, elaborated in Barry and Irving Bluestone's *Negotiating the Future*, was most fully achieved in the auto and steel industries. In effect, it gave labor the right to share in the productivity gains of modern technology as well as seniority and job classification systems which protected workers against arbitrary dismissal. Management gained the unquestioned right to make major decisions on when and where to invest in new technology and product choices as well as the right to control the pace and design of the work process. Workers were to be relatively highly paid cogs in industrial machines.

The postwar accord left workers vulnerable to efforts to stretch the hours and the pace of work; and it left an increasingly educated workforce frustrated by its relegation to an essentially rote status. Management, for its part, was vulnerable to informal employee resistance to the dictates of work and to competition from emerging low-wage havens and from advanced foreign competitors who had developed more progressive means of involving workers in product-planning and development strategies. These foreign firms had to share more power and profits with their workers, but also gradually became significantly more efficient and innovative.

Much of the post-World War II consensus inadvertently laid the groundwork for such tragedies as Phelps Dodge. Large industrial unions had been early supporters of a form of economic internationalism which encouraged foreign corporate investment and discouraged collaboration with foreign unions to raise wages for all. At home, unions became increasingly focused on good wages for their core workers rather than devoting some of their time to broader campaigns to organize the unorganized and to work politically for adequate wage standards and jobs for all. Unions often excluded women and minorities from their leadership and even their best apprenticeship programs. Within workplaces, these unions often helped management resist "wildcat" strikes for more worker autonomy.

The short-term monetary gains union leadership won for workers often came at the expense of the increased frustration of its membership about worklife concerns and declining levels of sympathy from service-sector and small-business workers who have been increasingly squeezed in the last two decades. It is therefore not surprising that efforts by the United Steel Workers, which represented Phelps Dodge workers, to rally national support for its strikers would come up short. Conservatives were in power, but that ascendancy owed something to the evolution of the union movement itself.

But if unions must bear some blame for these events, life without unions in any form offers us a bleak future. Under Phelps Dodge control, workers are now required to work twenty-six straight days before receiving two days off, and worker safety has deteriorated markedly. It is often argued that such changes are needed to meet "foreign competition," but corporate leadership has lobbied hard to keep adequate labor standards out of international trade agreements. Sagging wages may be good for short-term profits, but ultimately the decline of wages worldwide will undermine demand and force unemployment higher everywhere.

Unions and the rest of us are not powerless to fight such trends, but it will require a broader labor politics. At the center of that politics must be a new form of labor internationalism which will seek alliances with unions abroad and fight for minimum-wage and labor-organizing clauses in trade agreements, just as corporate America works for "intellectual property" standards in these agreements. Here at home unions must become more of a force for social justice and quality-of-life issues which have become increasingly salient. Jeremy Rifkin's recent *The End of Work* (Tarcher/Putnam) clearly documents the enormous social and environmental costs in continual expansions of GNP and efforts to stretch the hours of industrial workers to create that "wealth." Some union leaders and many rank-and-file members indicate that they would prefer future technological advances be used to shorten hours and share existing work rather than continually expand production.

Just as important, workers want much more out of their jobs than a good paycheck. The government's own recent studies of labor-management relations show that most workers feel their best talents are wasted in their workplaces. Only independent and more democratic unions can force corporations and Wall Street investors to look beyond short-term profits to long-term programs of worker training and empowerment. Finally, a union movement more interested in organizing unorganized workers—especially the growing cadre of part-time workers—and in pushing for new community job-creation programs through both local governments and the voluntary sector, as Rifkin advocates, would gain a larger voice in our politics.

None of these goals would be beyond our reach in the next two decades. Rosenblum's fine study of the role of a union in the life of one community makes clear why a revitalized union movement must be part of any democratic reconstruction of this society. □

REVIEWERS

GENE H. BELL-VILLADA *teaches Spanish at Williams College. His books include* García Marquez: The Man and His Work, *and a satirical novel,* The Carlos Chadwick Mystery.

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JOHN FEFFER *is the author of* Shock Waves: Eastern Europe after the Revolution *(South End).*

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NO END IN SIGHT

CONFRONTING POVERTY
Prescriptions for Change
Edited by Sheldon H. Danziger, Gary D. Sandefur, and Daniel H. Weinberg
Harvard University Press, $49.95/$19.95, 529 pp.

John Feffer

In its war on poverty, America is sunk in a quagmire much deeper than anything Vietnam ever offered. No peace beckons just around the corner, no dignified retreats are possible. Despite "solutions" from across the political spectrum, poverty has both increased steadily and intensified in its severity since the early 1970s. The victims have been countless, and no monument memorializes their suffering. Europe has its Bosnia, America its own inner cities. The landscapes—burned-out buildings, desperate homeless—can be terrifyingly similar.

Battle-weary but still prolific, America's poverty wonks continue to produce their proposals for reversing poverty's advantage. One of the most persistent of these strategists is Sheldon Danziger. Co-editor of the influential *Fighting Poverty* (1986) and the more recent *Uneven Tides* (1993), Danziger has assembled a group of like-minded academics who advocate a mix of hard-nosed and soft-hearted policies that fall somewhere between the New Deal and the New Democrats.

With their most recent collection of essays, *Confronting Poverty*, Danziger and company address their issue from a number of angles—welfare, the underclass, health care, employment, education, single mothers, urban policy, race, and immigration. The insights in this collection are often keen, the statistical information revealing, and the writing bearable for an academic effort. Not surprisingly, given the topic, the overall contents are sobering.

As the contributors summarize, not much has improved over the last decade since the publication of *Fighting Poverty*. The poor have gotten poorer, blacker, younger, less economically mobile, less competitive in the job market, less able to pay for health care. No one believes any more that a rising tide of economic growth will lift all boats. The tide is weak and the boats leaky, as James Tobin remarks in his contribution. And the United States remains an embarrassment among industrialized nations. From premature babies to the elderly, the rest of the industrialized world is better able to keep its citizens out of poverty, whether through more equitable wage structures or more generous government programs.

Danziger and colleagues haven't changed the general tenor of their prescriptions since their last major collection. They still support government programs, but acknowledge their inadequacy. They still prefer employment strategies to solely means-tested benefits. And they continue to maintain that programs should be targeted to particular constituencies rather than applied universally.

Where the new volume differs the most is in the political context. *Fighting Poverty* came out during Ronald Reagan's calculated stigmatization of the poor. *Confronting Poverty*, meanwhile, was prepared just as Bill Clinton entered the White House, with some of the essays even commenting on the new administration's first year.

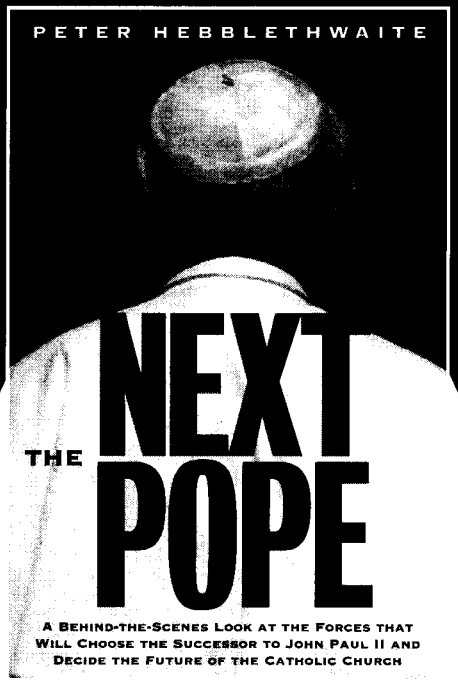
To appeal to this new administration, the contributors to *Confronting Poverty* make the ritual appeals for realism and pragmatism, and then aim for the center of the policy spectrum. One author dismisses national programs for job creation and health care as too expensive and structurally unsound. Target the benefits, most of the authors advise—it's easier to sell the program, get it off the ground, and monitor its effects. Use the tax system, such as the Earned Income Tax

"BEHIND THOSE WALLS, HISTORY IS BEING MADE"

As speculation to John Paul's successor mounts, a Vatican insider reveals the personalities, politics, and issues that will determine who will be the next pope.

"A savvy analysis of how the next pope will come to be chosen and the challenges he will face. . . . Presented intelligently and loyally."
— *Kirkus Reviews*

"Required reading for every thinking American."
—*Publishers Weekly*


PETER HEBBLETHWAITE
THE NEXT POPE
A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE FORCES THAT WILL CHOOSE THE SUCCESSOR TO JOHN PAUL II AND DECIDE THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Hardcover
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Credit (EITC), which gradually substitutes work for welfare. Calibrate carefully so that benefits do not diminish incentives, programs remain cost-effective, statistical improvements can be registered.

Being eclectic, however, the collection often rises above the conventional wisdom of the center. Social insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare, Gary Burtless writes, are more redistributive than they are often given credit for and do not lavish money on the nonpoor. Education vouchers, according to a model developed by Charles Manski, will neither positively nor negatively affect the poorest students. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Hugh Heclo points out, does not simply pay the able-bodied not to work: 70 percent of recipients are children and at most 3 percent of recipients are adults who could hold down a job. While not radical, these factual assertions run counter to the Democratic party's current obsession with squeezing social insurance programs, applying market principles to education, and kicking people off welfare.

Confronting Poverty reads even better when the authors look up from the statistics to address larger questions. Lawrence Bobo and Ryan Smith, in an essay on perceptions of poverty, effectively dismiss the popular misconception that Reagan-Bushism tilted the electorate away from the welfare state. And Hugh Heclo, in perhaps the book's most provocative chapter, supplies the all-important context to the debate. The poor have no power, he reminds us. Their advocates must develop political strategies on their behalf, for fine words will not translate into effective legislation. Heclo concludes that "Clinton's skill and interest in dealing with complex policy issues may be a toxic aptitude unless the larger political case can be made for doing such things. And this implies a motive force more like a red-blooded political movement than a policy seminar."

Prophetic words. Although promising much in the way of welfare reform, candidate Clinton never truly addressed poverty questions. Nor did he shed much light on the topic at his much-hyped economic conference in December 1992. President Clinton, meanwhile, can take credit only for an expansion of the EITC, an unquestionable improvement but nothing revolutionary. All other campaign promises—from an increased minimum wage to an expanded network of community development banks—have been left unrealized. Even the more centrist suggestions that captivated Clinton's supporters in the Democratic Leadership Council—such as welfare cut-offs and enterprise zones—were not seriously debated while Congress was still in Democratic hands.

In other words, Clinton gave America a half-baked policy session, neglected to inspire a movement for his programs, and inevitably backed right into a new Republican congressional majority that wants to put its own people first. In this new terrain, *Confronting Poverty* reads like yesterday's battle plan. Soon, perhaps, more inspired leadership will again find its way to Washington. In the meantime, however, America's war on poverty will continue to churn out victims and policy proposals in dizzying proportions. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

the ages, for the better. Even in societies that still condone the death penalty, we no longer torture or crucify or copy the murderer's method of killing.

The society that spares the guilty one is simply better than the society that kills. Has Mr. Baumann never asked why every other democracy in the Western world (except South Africa) has eliminated capital punishment? I submit that it is ultimately because of the example of Christ, the innocent one, the one who put death to death, and who did not ask retribution for his judicial murder. That is why we have arrived at last at the point of asking abolition of the death penalty.

PETER J.RIGA

Numbers can trick

Dallas, Oreg.

To the Editors: The problem with Richard Schoenherr's "Numbers Don't Lie" [April 7] is not with the numbers themselves, but with the analysis. The incompleteness of the investigation suggests to me that the answers were postulated in the researcher's mind before the data were collected and analysis completed.

Why was it not noted that vocations are doing just fine in the dioceses of Peoria, Lincoln, and Arlington? Seminarians in these dioceses are sent to orthodox seminaries. Maybe, as John Kippley has noted in the *Catholic World Report*, God provides the grace of vocations only if his message is not censored, as it is in many other diocesan programs. It would seem to me that the approach of any program that is working should be mentioned as a possible corrective.

I also wonder why, if married priests are the answer to the shortage, the Orthodox Church in America, which allows married priests, will also soon be facing a vocation crisis, as noted by John Garvey in *Commonweal* [October 8, 1993].

JOHN KLEINHENZ

The author replies:

Our data are based on a random sample of eighty-nine dioceses, representing 68 percent of U.S. diocesan priests, or some 36,000 priests, whose demographic events were recorded for nineteen years. The study was sponsored by the United States Catholic Conference and the data from each diocese were checked by local officials. In the final report [*Full Pews and Empty Altars*, Richard A. Schoenherr and Lawrence A. Young, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993], we document that the number of priests is growing in about 10 percent of the dioceses. Obviously, they are not growing fast enough to offset the national trend, which shows a strong overall decline.

Readers may decide whether our sample or John Kleinhenz's is incomplete, and whether the data verified by church officials are biased by my personal convictions, as he implies. We may wonder, further, about the bias he imputes to God, whose grace is limited to those dioceses that embody Mr. Kleinhenz's views about church reform.

Finally, I note in the article that the root cause of the decline is twofold: celibate and male exclusivity. The Orthodox church might solve its vocation crisis by ordaining women. The historical record shows that other Christian churches embraced

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gender inclusivity in the ordained ministry after they had incorporated marital-status inclusivity. RICHARD A. SCHOENHERR

No moonlighting needed

Utopiaville, Planet Earth

To the Editors: James Panella speculates in his letter [Correspondence, May 19] that married priests might have to take second jobs in order to support their families, thereby having even less time to prepare sermons.

It's not necessarily so. Under section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code, clergy are entitled to certain tax allowances for housing expenses. My Protestant counterparts are able to house themselves well, raise families, serve their people, preach effective sermons, and still have time for golf! Subtract the cost of maintaining a parish rectory and in some cases you can add another minister!

It's time for Catholic finance committees to engage in ecumenical dialogue with other churches to dispel the "money myth" being used to discredit the notion of a married priesthood.

But please withhold my name. In this feudal system, I'm basically a serf.

CLERICUS

Coalition defended

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: In response to George W. Gerner's article on "Catholics & the Religious Right" [May 5], which makes mention of my own role as officer in charge of Catholic Outreach at the Washington office of the Christian Coalition, I wish to offer some clarifications and comments.

One could easily assume from the article that there was some master plan to enlist the clergy of the Arlington diocese in the Oliver North campaign. Mr. Gerner neglected to mention that the meeting I set up for Ralph Reed [executive director of the Christian Coalition] was also attended by priests from the Washington archdiocese, several priests from religious orders, and lay persons.

The purpose of the meeting was to enable Mr. Reed to exchange thoughts and ideas with a representative group of Catholics. Politics were not on the agenda. Nor was there any connection with Frank Nassetta and the League of Catholic Voters. At the time of the luncheon, I did not even know Mr. Nassetta. My efforts and his were entirely separate and independent.

With regard to the voter guides, they were factual representations of how candidates had voted or stood on the issues. Senator Charles Robb's votes on voluntary prayer and abortion are public information. These voter guides reflect the candidates' positions on all prolife and profamily issues, and it is easy to understand why many candidates do not wish to have their record so noted.

When President Bill Clinton replaces a strident anti-Catholic bigot as surgeon general with a man who has served the abortion lobby well by not only performing abortions but serving as a director of Planned Parenthood, and when Catholics look for support and outrage from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference and receive an empty response, is it any surprise that they join and march forward with their Evangelical friends who provide response and a plan of action? How ironic it is, in light of the recent and powerful encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, that Catholics can obtain more help from the Southern Baptist Convention in trying to prevent Dr. Henry Foster from becoming surgeon general than from the main focus groups of their own church. G.A. GIBLIN

The author replies:

There is less disagreement between Mr. Giblin's letter and my article than meets the eye.

In disclaiming a Christian Coalition "master plan" to enlist the support of the Arlington diocese for the Oliver North campaign, Mr. Giblin draws and then denies an inference of intrigue that was not implied, much less asserted. On the other hand, his suggestion that the June meeting of Arlington clergy (and others) with Ralph Reed was totally apolitical is disingenuous. The diocese's campaign involvement by free publication and distribution of a "voter guide" sponsored by the Coalition and the local League of Catholic Voters was as documented in my article with information supplied by Mr. Nassetta, the League's founder.

Mr. Giblin defends the Coalition's single-phrase "voter guides" by simply reasserting that they are factual. Clearly, that evaluation is not universally shared. Of ten "supports/opposes" positions attributed to Senator Charles Robb by the Coalition's voter guide as published by the Arlington diocese, Senator Robb's office states that six were "false." Mr. Giblin writes that Senator Robb's vote on (against) voluntary school prayer, for example, is "well known," but gives no citation. Senator Robb's office cited his vote in favor of the Helms-Lott Amendment (No. 1382) to S1150/HR801, which *supports* school prayer.

Mr. Giblin's final paragraph effectively describes why the "religious right" is sometimes the most articulate spokesman for certain moral concerns Catholics share with other Americans. I agree.

GEORGE W. GERNER

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Unwelcome guidance

Rockford, Ill.

To the Editors: On a Sunday before the presidential election of 1992, I found in my pew a leaflet indicating how each candidate stood on certain issues. By looking at the fine print at the bottom, I confirmed my guess: the leaflet came from the Christian Coalition. I got very little out of that Mass. The notion that we Catholics needed to be educated by the likes of Pat Robertson, in light of the scathing remarks that have flowed from his lips over the years and his defamatory attacks on Bill Clinton during the campaign, left me seething. Reading your article on "Catholics and the 'Religious Right'" got me seething all over again. This time it wasn't just the Christian Coalition—it was "Catholic Outreach," functioning in the Arlington, Virginia, diocese with the apparent blessing of Catholic clergy and the hierarchy. Did they really promote the candidacy of Oliver North for the United States Senate, thereby holding this man up as an example of a good Christian? If so, what is the Catholic church coming to?

As for Mr. Gerry Giblin, described in your article as a Catholic working as a volunteer for the Coalition, I would urge him to find something to do to help the poor and the downtrodden. Let him find a bishop who will stand up and be counted to help the victims of AIDS, let him join former President Jimmy Carter in helping to build housing for the poor. This is what Catholics should be about.

ROSEMARY CONNELL

Seinfeld interruptus

Napa, Calif.

To the Editors: On first reading Dennis Burke's tepid assessment of Catholic preaching [April 7], I thought, "Well, maybe more preparation would help. Probably not, though," had another glass of wine, and watched a rerun of "Seinfeld." I'd seen the episode before, but it was still funny, touching, and even a little insightful.

But after reading Rev. Michael Kerper's appalling letter [May 19] suggesting that the laity are to blame for poor preaching because we have numbed ourselves with television, movies, the Internet (imagine!), and other media, I was actually enraged enough to set down my wine glass, press the mute button, and respond (I waited for the commercials).

The clergy have been blaming the laity for the pathetic state of parish life for decades. Not enough commitment. Not enough donations. Men care only about football on Sundays.

This hand-wringing and whining has to stop. Give us something better! Give us something we long to be involved in as much as watching sports with friends. But please don't criticize the things that successfully appeal to our imagination, passion, and desire for community. Just do it better.

As far as I can see, Catholic priests can't preach because they have nothing to say. So instead of honestly engaging the Scriptures, they read the bulletin. They tell stories about the Holy Land. They recite dogma. Or they twist each week's Gospel into an anthem for their personal pet causes (prolife, pro-*celibacy*, whatever). They need conversion.

I don't think practicing will help enliven the spiritual lives of priests and turn them into what they are supposed to be—spiritual leaders who are the first in the community to struggle to put Jesus' teaching into practice, and who are the first to interpret their experience in the shattering light of the gospel.

We lay people may be malnourished from a diet of television and talk radio, but don't blame the starving for their hunger. Give us richer food. And don't unplug my cable, Father Kerper, until you have something better to offer.

Okay, the commercials are over. Gotta run.

BILL PEATMAN

Beware of the bounce

Clifton, N.J.

To the Editors: With respect to the perceived quality of preaching, one aspect not yet touched upon by your authors and correspondents is the proper use of a multispeaker audio amplifier. The voice of a speaker using a PA system comes from as many directions as there are loudspeakers. The multiple sounds arrive at different times for different listeners, since each speaker is a different distance from every listener. The differences may be small, but they all add up to confusion and difficulty in listening.

There is a cure. Choral directors know that they must set the tempo of their music to the acoustics of the space where the music is to be heard. They know that the "bounce" time has to be judged so that they will not be competing with the returning echo of whatever was just sung. Preachers and other speakers must do the same; that is, they must speak slowly enough so that the "echo" effect will not make their words unintelligible.

CHARLES P. HUETHER

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The remains of one man's day

STEVEN LEWIS

More than a year has rattled past since I saw *Remains of the Day*, but the character played by Anthony Hopkins has become a face whose shaded eyes and strangled lips I recognize everywhere I go. I have seen him on Metro North trains, in coffee shops, leaning out of car windows. He once served me in a dream.

The slow-moving, understated film concerns an English butler whose devotion to a life of service keeps him alone, unloved, and unfulfilled. At the end of his day, all that remains is hollow intention.

I cannot escape the remains of that movie. It was about my father who devoted the soul of a lifetime to his business. It was about my good friend, a contractor, who carried on at work through the terrible darkness of his father's death; my nephew Jake who wrote a painful story about a boy's inability to tell a girl he loved her; my dear sons who daily grow less able to cry out at the awful pain of life, or to double over with laughter at the absurdity of it all.

It is about the silence of men.

And so, of course, it is about me, though to look at my raucous, unprivate life with seven children, a sensuous wife, and a healthy disrespect for rules, you'd think that I saw a different film from everyone else. I didn't.

The following anecdote is embarrassing to tell because it points out how petty I am, how imprisoned I am by my silence. Some time ago a publisher of some renown bought a weekend retreat in our dead-end lane. It got the locals talking because everyone figured that property values would increase. But I was also privately thrilled because I'm a writer. The serendipity of his arrival seemed like going from fly fishing a raging creek to dropping a line in a stocked pond.

Logic—and my good wife—urged me to be neighborly, to stroll over and introduce myself. Once on his doorstep, she imagined, we would find a companionship of spirit. He would pass my work on to his editors with *instructions*. Fame and fortune would be a commission away.

Yet the winter and spring passed and I did not walk the half mile to his house through the woods. Whenever I replayed the *neighborly visit* scene in my head, it felt fawning.

So I did nothing. And months later when I finally did meet the man—I backed my Jeep into his rental car!—I did not use the coincidence to my advantage. We laughed about finally meeting "by accident." Then he accepted my apologies and we went our separate ways.

In retrospect, I guess it would have been okay to let it slip that I am a writer, just as I suppose it would have been all right if someone spoke for the butler in the movie and told the maid that he loved her. I suppose. But not really.

After the movie, my wife said she was frustrated and angry with the butler's unwillingness to take that one step, to utter that one sound that would have gotten the Emma Thompson character to complete his life. Finally. But my friend, Steve, the building contractor, whispered that he wished the film had gone on for hours.

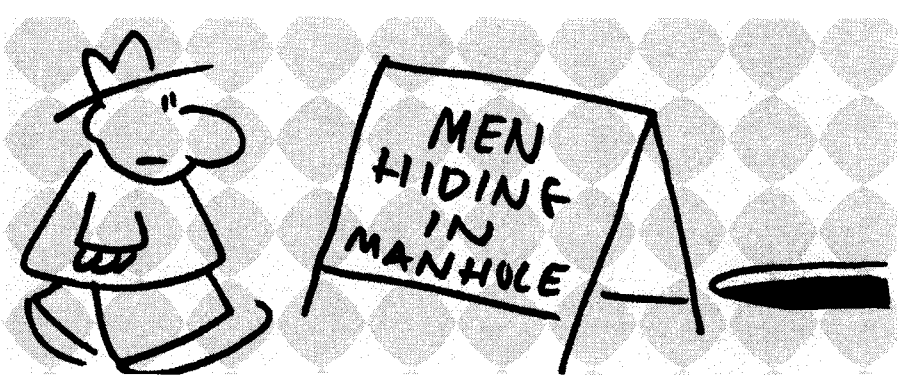
Me too. A light had been turned in my own corridor of silence, and in the shadows I saw the faces of the men I know. I wanted to linger there in that quiet hall for a while longer.

Every day since memory took root—back in the thickening darkness of my own private adolescence—I have had a sense of having to coerce myself through some flimsy curtain that separates me from all that I yearn for—companionship, love, approval, joy. Even now, at forty-nine, when I come home from work to a family that I love with all my heart, I must urge myself—bully myself on the darker days—to part the gauzy folds of this lonely retreat before I walk through the door.

So I do it, compel myself to do it. Still, at the risk of seeming overly dramatic (and thus less a man), it is always done with a sense of peril to my identity, my notions of duty and dignity, my stubborn, protected privacy. It is as if I am stepping onto a stage of my fondest dreams where the lights are suddenly too bright, the floor too slippery, the laughter too loud, the life too livid.

But I do it, although it would feel safer to disappear behind the newspaper. Or hide in the bathroom. Or find some dutied solace in work. The remains of a man's day. □

Steven Lewis is a mentor at Empire State College, New Paltz, New York, and a freelance writer.



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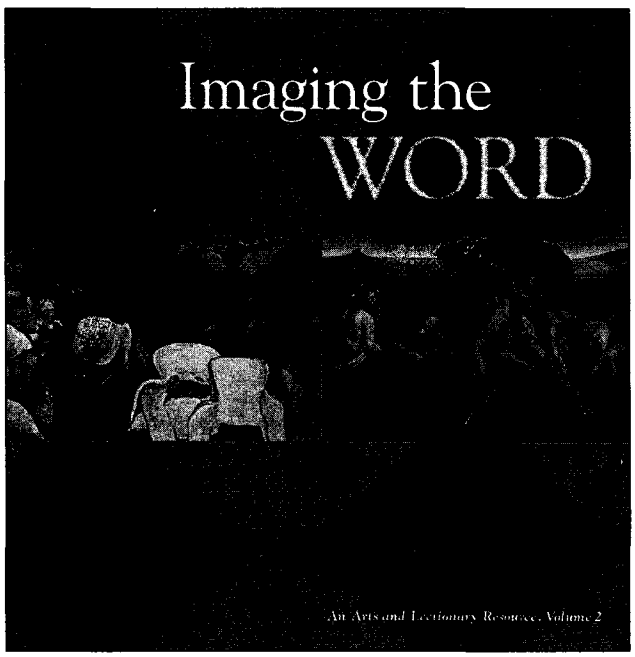

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